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FIRST IN THE FIELD.

VOL. III.

FIRST IN THE FIELD.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"RECOMMENDED TO MERCY,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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FIRST IN THE FIELD.

CHAPTER I.

"IT *is* so good of you, Con, to think so much more of pleasing me than of doing what you like yourself. *I* shall be as happy as the day is long at The Firs—that is," Lolo, correcting herself rapidly, added, "if *you* are. But I am half afraid—men and women so rarely like the same places—that you won't be; and, if the hunting is not good, I shall be miserable."

They were on their way back to London—Conrad, his wife, and Regy, from a day's visit to The Firs. Neither of the men seemed much inclined, as the "express" bowled swiftly onward, for conversation; and Laura, whose tem-

per was anything but a "touchy" one, and who had been married long enough not to feel *very* much surprised when her lively remarks passed unheeded or unnoticed by her husband, took her cue (as, like a wise woman, she usually did) from him, and, sinking back into her comfortable corner, indulged, regardless of expense, in a delightful dream of money-spending, the object thereof being the improvement and beautifying of The Firs, when that charming residence should actually come into her possession.

From time to time—for Laura Temple had no notion, if she could help it, of enjoying a pleasure alone—she threw a glance at Conrad, in the hope that, *at last*, she might venture to ask him some such important question as "Did he think that dining-room curtains *always* ought to be of crimson damask?" but, seeing the same absorbed and unanswering look upon his handsome features, she wisely abstained from dis-

turbing him, leaving for some more propitious moment the propounding of her simple domestic queries.

Far enough would this happy-tempered heiress wife have been (even had she set her entire wits to work) from guessing what was the subject matter of the thoughts by which Conrad Temple was so deeply and entirely engrossed; and had anyone (Regy, for instance, who, having had some serious conversation with his brother on the previous day, might have been qualified to give an opinion on the subject) ventured to hint that "money, and how to make it," was the vexed question which Colonel Temple was turning so assiduously over in his mind, I am inclined to think that Mistress Laura, being a young person prone to speaking her mind, would have shown herself more incredulous than the suggester of such an "impossibility" would have deemed altogether flattering.

And yet how true would have been the assertion! How entirely uncontrovertible was the fact! Rich though he was, and entirely, as regarded the spending of something about £7,000 per annum, his own master; with a wife who was generously addicted to obliviousness of the fact that "the money was hers," and that through her instrumentality the pecuniary condition of his family had been so signally improved, Conrad Temple, with scarcely a wish ungratified, and without, as had hitherto been supposed, any especial leaning towards greed or covetousness, had nevertheless set his whole heart—and that after a fashion which almost amounted to monomania—on the possession of the famous £20,000 of which mention (as the reader may possibly recollect) has already been made in a former chapter. It seemed a little hard to understand the motives for this singular but most determined ambition. Conrad was guiltless of any gambling propensities, cared

little for excitement, and had no extravagant tastes of a private nature, necessitating the possession of "private means" to gratify them. Could it be simply, as Conrad had told Regy, the desire not to be solely dependent on his rich wife that drove him into the speculation the very name of which had proved so utterly distasteful to the younger brother? Partly this, certainly; but over and above this motive there was a feeling of intense desire, vague and incomprehensible even to himself, but which urged him on with a power greater even than his own volition, to obtain a sum of money (twenty thousand pounds was its minimum amount) sufficiently *important* to justify him in not considering himself in the light of a pauper enriched by the fortune of a woman.

The dismal forebodings with which Reginald greeted the intelligence that the first step in what *he* considered to be the worst and lowest species of gambling was about to be taken by

his brother, had not produced the smallest effect in causing the infatuated Con to hold his hand, or flee from the temptation which assailed him. The agitated entreaty, together with certain mysterious hints which Regy, whilst imploring Conrad to have nothing to do with that evil thing called stock-jobbing, had dropped, had at first surprised as much as they had puzzled Con, but the impression did not last. As utterly impossible would it be for a timid horsewoman to check the speed of a seasoned hunter, as he rushes with mad eagerness at a five-barred gate, as for Reginald Temple, in sad and serious earnest though he was (for the shame of one brother rendered him morbidly sensitive touching the honour of the other), to arrest, even for a single moment, the "first step," which might, he feared, be such a costly one!

Feeling to the full his powerlessness to influence for good the mind of one who, for the moment, was possessed by a fixed idea (and be-

tween so possessed and *possessing* the same, there exists, I may here remark incidentally, an important difference), Regy, his own kind heart being just then surcharged with anxieties still more trying than those appertaining to Con's problematical future, followed the wise example of his sister-in-law, and ensconcing himself, as had done his two companions (for they had the compartment to themselves), in his corner, remained, until the end of the short journey, wrapped in his own reflections.

He was roused from a painful train of thought by Conrad's pleasant voice.

"Now then, Lolo, got all your traps? That's right! Look sharp," the voice said; and in a few more minutes, the tickets having been "taken," and Laura's "traps" bundled out, the travellers are standing together on the platform of the South Western Terminus. Dixon is already there, in readiness to receive the orders of his blind master.

"I suppose we can't do anything for you, Redge?" Conrad, after he has hustled—for he seems in a tremendous hurry—his wife into a four-wheeler, says. "I'm off to the City, and Dixon's here; but if you would like——"

"Thanks, I want nothing," the sad, quiet voice answers. "I have promised Laura to dine in Dover Street at seven."

"That's all right," almost shouts Conrad from his Hansom. "Seven, sharp!" And away rattles the broken-kneed thoroughbred, which will run, poor beast, like the eyes in the old riddle, "till it drops;" whilst Regy, moving slowly, piloted by the faithful Dixon through the crowd, is safely deposited in a "neat Clarence" which is in waiting for him.

"Number Thirteen, Well Street," is the direction given by Dixon to the coachman, who, but for his hat, which is a trifle "reddish" and shiny, and his great-coat, which is adorned with shabby coronetted buttons, might have passed

for a gentleman's servant, and who, with a touch of his well-worn hat to his employer, whose eyes, as the "careful driver" (see advertisement) afterwards told his "missus," looked, to him, "uncommon queer," proceeded on his way, leaving Mr. Dixon, with a rather dissatisfied look on his honest countenance, gazing after the hired Clarence, as it is driven slowly out of the station gates.

CHAPTER II.

AND what, all this time, has Lizzie, the object of so much unappreciated interest and solicitude, been about? Is she still lingering on the verge of the precipice down which, if a woman once slides, there is for her no redemption? Still—hesitating between good and evil—standing (her weak, vacillating nature turning her first one way, and then the other) where the cross-roads meet, which lead (such opposite ways!) to evil or to good?"

If an answer—"without words"—were needed for such questions as those, it would be found in the fact that Charley Askew is as de-

voted as ever to the beautiful girl, the knowledge of whose real position he has (though no thanks to her husband for this late divulging of the truth) at length arrived at.

The discovery came about after this wise.

They were walking—for I fear that Lizzie did not always take the greatest possible pains to conceal her movements from her only speaking acquaintance (as she termed this dangerous man of the world)—in one of the grass enclosures of the Regent's Park.

It was the fourth time that Lizzie had seen the individual who, in her present *delaissée* and rather forlorn condition, could not but occupy a considerable portion of her thoughts, to say nothing of the feelings which, in a healthy, well-conditioned young person of nineteen, are seldom in a dormant state. Easter was over, the London "season" had fairly set in, and Lizzie, with the natural longing of a young and pretty woman for the "fine feathers which

make fine birds," had a good deal more than begun to wonder whether it would ever occur to Guy that her dress had grown very shabby, so shabby, indeed, that she could quite understand how he, who was always so well got up (flower in button-hole, French gloves, and all the *et-ceteras* of a well-dressed man's toilette) should shrink from being seen abroad with her. But, Lizzie thought, it would be so easy for him to change all this. It would require so little money —a fact which she longed, yet had not sufficient courage, to impress upon her self-engrossed husband's mind—to transfer her from an untidy dowdy into quite as presentable a companion as any of the fair dames and damsels attired in the last Spring Paris fashions, who helped to make Bond Street gay, and the drive in Hyde Park delightful.

Poor foolish Lizzie! Her insane ambition to take rank and position as a "lady" had certainly hitherto entailed upon her little save

mortification and discomfort, and never had she herself been more cruelly convinced of this depressing truth than on the morning of Easter Sunday, when Mrs. Payne, the owner of No. 13, Well Street, York Place, took it into her head to be more familiar in her manner towards her lodger than the "second-floor front" felt disposed to tolerate. It was—as Mrs. Temple, *alias* Fletcher, was quite quick-witted enough to understand—chiefly owing to the daily increasing shabbiness of her attire that her landlady (influenced, as so many of us are, by outward show and appearance) had lost much of the respectful tone, and not a little of the I-know-how-to-keep-my-distance manner which she had formerly evinced towards the young lady who, "poor" as were her clothes, had never, as yet, left, for more than a week, Mrs. Payne's "little book" unsettled.

Easter Day fell late that year, and a more brilliant sun than that which shone on the

dented Britannia metal teapot, from which poor Lizzie was pouring out her solitary cup of tea, could hardly (in dingy London, at least) be surpassed. A providential day, indeed, for holiday-makers, and the sheen on pavement and house-top of those bright, warming rays, would doubtless cause many a heart (amongst the vast proportion of those to whom, from poverty, sickness, and "causes too numerous to mention," dark weather and light are pretty much alike) to sing—metaphorically speaking, of course, for it is not the ordinary Londoner's habit to be melodious—"for joy!"

To our poor Lizzie the "jocund sun-beams," playing over the stale yesterday's "half-quartern loaf," and causing the small lump of streaky, highly-coloured butter, to look more than usually untempting, brought no pleasure. She had been a whole week alone, Guy being on a visit —at least, so he had told her—to his own "people" for Easter, and the days had dragged

on with a terribly weary length for unemployed, remorseful Lizzie. Was it for this, she asked herself, that she forsook the home where she was loved and valued, and where, she mentally added, looking pitifully at the well-worn black silk dress (her last birthday present from the kind uncle she had deserted), she spent every farthing of thirty pounds a year upon her "clothes," and had always looked "like a lady."

Lizzie, on that sun-lit holiday, the first Easter since she had married a "gentleman," is indulging in a melancholy retrospective reverie, the substance of which may, from the few last lines, be gathered, when the entrance of Mrs. Payne, unprefaced by the "tap" with which the "respectable housekeeper" had been, in the earlier days of her "relations" with Mrs. Fletcher, wont to herald her advent, rouses Lizzie from her train of thought.

A woman of rather imposing presence is

Mrs. Payne—a *lady*, as she, without doubt, calls herself—who had, in her long-past youth, been of a comely presence, and still continues, especially on gala days, like the present, to "cut," with the useful foreign aid of ornament, "a good figure" amongst her compeers. By the side of her rich black moiré, Lizzie's well-worn silk dress, made in last year's fashion, turned once, and looking very much as if, like Dick Whittington of glorious memory, it ought to be "turned again," Uncle John's birthday present sinks even lower than before in Mrs. Temple's jaundiced eyes. The idea too flashes across her mind that Mrs. Payne has come to show off her fresh Easter Sunday finery before the eyes of her "shabby genteel" attired lodger; and the notion is far from pleasing to our sensitive and anything but strong-minded heroine.

The wish is very strong upon her to display, in the sight of vulgar Mrs. Payne, something of

that crushing grandeur of demeanour which, in Lizzie's opinion, is one of the marked characteristics (as regards their treatment of those beneath them) of a fine lady's deportment; but unfortunately there exists, save in exceptional cases—in those especially who are "born," as the stereotyped saying is, "in the purple"—a strong antagonism between the sense of inferiority which poverty-betraying dress entails, and the well-developed desire of its wearer to bring an offending fellow-mortal to a proper sense of his social standing. In presence of that splendid toilette, of those glittering, meretricious gauds, and of the assured look and bearing which the consciousness of being so infinitely "finer" than her lodger, has imparted to worthy Mistress Payne, Lizzie is struck, for the moment, dumb. Self-assertion is suspended, and she listens mutely to the diurnal question, of which, coming from her landlady's lips, she had grown so mortally

tired—the question, that is, of what she (Lizzie) would like for dinner.

With a smile that is emphasized by the fact of its being Easter Sunday, Mrs. Payne suggests a mutton chop.

"A nicely broiled mutton chop. I'm going out for the day myself," Mrs. Payne, with the proud consciousness that her friends at Gravesend "live independent," and are people that can keep their "one horse shay," continues, "but Sarah's a'most as good a hand as I am at a chop; and with a bit o' fish——"

"Oh! Mrs. Payne," breaks in poor Lizzie, who unfortunately happens to have a not very agreeable recollection of a certain flabby "slip," otherwise called a small sole, which Mrs. Payne (who catered for such of her lodgers as wished to save themselves trouble) had "sent up" for the last Sunday dinner of her second-floor *locataire*—"oh! Mrs. Payne, I do *so* dislike Sunday fish. They are so soft; and the bones

are so red, I would rather have nothing at all for dinner than a sole like the last."

"As you please, 'm—it's the same to me," Mrs. Payne, who, when "put out," is a trifle warm in her temper, says tartly; adding, however, in a more conciliatory tone (for having bought the fish cheap, and intending to make Mrs. *Fletcher* pay pretty dearly for the luxury, it behoved the purchaser thereof to make the best of the article), "I don't think as you'll find anything to complain of in the whiting. Mr. Knowles has served this 'ouse for years, and I've never known him to sell me a bad article yet."

By this time Lizzie was heartily wishing to free her small sitting-room from the encumbering presence of Mrs. Payne and her gorgeous company gown. It was less from a real distaste for the piscatory dainty proposed for her delectation by the landlady, than from a desire to demonstrate the flattering fact that she had

a will of her own, that the girl's mild protest against "flabby" fish was owing; so, acting on the urgent dread (for in that costume, and with so grand a chignon on her middle-aged head, Mrs. Payne seemed capable of any enormity) that the wife of the Custom-house official would be bold enough, as had once before been the case, to "take a chair," Mrs. Temple, with as much stiffness of manner as she could bring herself to assume, says—

"I beg your pardon. I have no doubt the dinner will be very good; it will be owing to my want of appetite if I find it otherwise."

"Do you think so, now? Well, laws me! I shouldn't wonder," begins Mrs. Payne; and then, horror of horrors! she justifies Lizzie's worst fears by appropriating to herself one of her own rickety chairs, and seating her portly person in near proximity to the slender form of her victim. "As I was a-saying, it ain't no wonder if you don't have your appetite as you

ought to. Payne was a-talking of your staying at 'ome so much, only the other day, and says he, 'That young woman'——Coming!—I hears you!—I ain't deaf!" flashes out Mr. Payne's better-half, as a stentorian voice upon the stairs is heard shouting, "Now, then, are *you* going to be all day? We shall lose the train if you don't look sharp!"

A connubial hint, which his better-half, who knows by experience the advantage of keeping "Payne" in good humour on excursion-days, does not appear at all inclined to disregard.

So Lizzie is left, a solitary unit (in her own view of matters), in dull, silent, Sundayfied London, whilst all the rest of the world is "gone a-pleasuring"—gone, she bitterly tells herself, to join friends and relations in the blessed, cheerful country—gone, without a thought of her, the neglected, deceived, and desolate one. Her thoughts—the purest and best of those "winged messengers," over which

the wisest of mortals have often, alas! so little power—often flew back to the "Lees," and to the life so free from care, and so guarded by a solid, unsentimental affection, which she had never till now learned to prize, that she had led there. But, strong as was the contrast between her existence at the farm and her present dreary loneliness, not yet does Lizzie repent her humbly of the deed that she had done. There have been moments, certainly, and amongst them were a few of those during which, whilst pouring out her wrongs to Reginald Temple, she had acknowledged herself to have been "deceitful above all things, and desperately ungrateful." She had also to him confessed to enduring bitter disappointment, and had in plain English freely owned that "le jeu ne valait pas la chandelle," and yet she was not humble! For, notwithstanding this mortifying admission, Lizzie still hoped that *in time* the object of her ambition would be

gained, and full amends be made to her for her present trials and privations. Nothing, happily, could untie the knot which bound her to a member of an honourable and wealthy family; and in the meantime—well, in the meantime there were, alas! temptations in her way, which, being human, she might not be always proof against. Times and occasions there were, and of them not a few, when her angry and contemptuous feelings towards her husband caused the gate of the citadel to be left ajar, and exposed her to risks from *within*, of the nature of which she was as yet only half conscious—from within, inasmuch as it is terribly true that, as the Bible text informs us, "a little fire kindleth a great matter," and that it is equally a fact (as we are informed by the same high authority) that the "things which are from *within* are those that do defile a man."

Lizzie had witnessed with tolerable equanimity the departure on the previous Monday

of Guy for Temple Court. She had grown to loathe the loneliness of her life; but Guy having said to her in his positive way, "You see they would think it so very strange if I were to break through old family rules; and it isn't wise—you must own *that*, Liz—to put suspicions into their heads," she yielded with a good grace, and prepared to get through as best she could, "with books and work" ("healthful play" being, in every sense of the word, denied to her) the long hours of loneliness that lay before her.

And monotonously enough did they creep on, those hours, till, on the Thursday after Guy's departure, the post brought her something fresh and exciting to think about.

A letter from her husband! The envelope at least was directed by him, and bore her name and address, but, on opening it, and reading the words "My dear mother," she became, of course, at once aware that Guy had made the

very common mistake of placing—probably *two* letters in envelopes for which they were not intended.

She read the short missive, without a moment's hesitation, to the end, and these were the words which met her eyes:

"MY DEAR MOTHER,

"I cannot tell you how sorry I am not to be able to go to Temple Court, but Business before Pleasure ought to be the lawyer's motto. Mr. Heywood has asked me several times to his villa at Sunnyside, near Kingston, and I have never yet been able, although well aware that he is more likely to help me to briefs than any man I know, to fix a day to go. *Now* I have promised to remain till Wednesday, when I return to town.

"Your affectionate son,

"GUY TEMPLE.

"P.S.—You will be glad to hear—as you are

always twitting me with not caring for young ladies' society—that there are two remarkably nice Miss Heywoods, with, it is *said*, very tolerable expectations. Kind love to Regy."

"The wretch! How I *do* hate him!" These were the words, spoken quite aloud, which were "syllabled" by Lizzie Temple, after her brain had taken in—as far as it was able to do—the sense of this unlucky letter. In her wrath—and she was bitterly angry—there existed no mixture of jealousy. Even had she not shrewdly suspected, what was indeed the case, that Guy, who piqued himself on his "cunning," had thrown out the names of the heiresses as a blind wherewith to hoodwink his relations, Lizzie could not, methinks, have had her heart (or her *vanity*, I cannot venture to say which) greatly torn by the thought that Guy was sunning himself in the presence of the nice girls who had—important prestige—"expectations." What Liz-

zie did hate and despise was the miserable deception which the man to whom she had linked herself for life was lowering himself in her sight by employing.

"Why could he not," she asked of her indignant self, "be open with me about this visit? Perhaps he thinks," with a curl of her crimson lip which would have done Charley Askew good to see, "that I should object to his amusing himself."

And then—any sympathy with Guy's tribulation on the subject of evil consequences likely to arise from his blunder being non-existent—Lizzie recollected, with a wild thrill of joy, that *possibly the* letter to her, which might have fallen into Mrs. Temple's hands, would betray the carefully-guarded secret.

It was *only*, however, a possibility. Guy was, for a young man, singularly cautious. The wise advice of the most heartless of men, "Never to write, and never to destroy," was

one of the axioms which he most admired and followed. *Only* a hope; and yet Lizzie, from Wednesday till Saturday, when the post brought her another letter (*this* time not even *apparently* from Guy) which completely turned the current of her ideas, continued to be slightly buoyed up with the very faintest of expectations that Chance had at last befriended her, and that Guy must now perforce make her, in the eyes of the world and of Colonel Askew, an honest woman.

CHAPTER III.

THE letter, as "respectful" as a love-letter could be, but nevertheless a letter which could only have been written to a woman who had, according to the writer's belief, shaken hands with and bidden Respectability farewell for ever, was signed at full length, "Charley Askew," and contained, as the "burden of its song," such an eloquently and touchingly urged entreaty that "Mrs. Fletcher would grant him *one* interview, only one, he *dared* not pray for more," that the credulous Lizzie, than whom few young women of her age were less accomplished in the art of picking out truth from falsehood,

and separating what was *real* in feeling from that which was acted for a purpose, believed honestly, in her soft, womanly heart, that to refuse Colonel Askew's gentle entreaty would be an act of cruelty which the best of women could hardly bring herself to perpetrate.

It was very hard upon him, poor fellow, that he, with that soft, kindly nature of his (how fond, Lizzie thought, his sisters must be of him!), should have chanced to fall in love with *her*. Being a married woman, what—she asked herself—could be more unfortunate! Utterly ignorant at present of the *truth*, the time *must* come (did Lizzie *now* wish that time to be shortened?) when this well-bred, agreeable man, whose devotion to herself made so striking a contrast with her husband's manner and conduct, would, of a surety, know *all;* and then—— Ah! how great would be the shock to that devoted heart! How long might it be before this delightful victim of her attractions would recover

from the blow that Fate had dealt to him?"

"A vain young woman this," my reader will perhaps be ready to exclaim," and one who richly deserves to have her pride brought low, and her honour dragged through the dust."

Granted; but then if, as inspired Shakespeare reminds us, we all had our deserts, who should escape whipping? And, moreover, be it remembered that poor Lizzie Temple, being more her own enemy than that of any soul that lives, she is perhaps less worthy of castigation than were many of those who are so ready ("cat" in hand) to administer condign punishment on the offender. Well did this daughter of Eve (and it would have been strange indeed had she *not* made the discovery) know that she was "fair." Had her own mirror not revealed to her a fact which no woman is backward in believing, there existed in her short career such ample corroborative proofs that Lizzie's claims to admiration were of no common order, that bearing, as she

did, in mind the "weakness" which, in more "manhoods" than one, her loveliness had wrought, Mrs. Temple—whose knowledge of the world and of human nature was limited in the extreme—may perhaps be in some sort held excused for the kind of tender pity with which the thought of Charley Askew's woes inspired her.

And yet, though to compassion for unhappiness which her admirer knew so well how to paint, was added a young girl's natural yearning for any change, even though it might be a disagreeable one, which would break the wearying uniformity of her existence, Lizzie did not, till that eventful Easter Sunday, when the pin-pricks of mortified vanity and pride were added to the "sting" conveyed in Guy's misdirected letter, ever *quite* seriously think of doing that which her conscience told her would be wrong—the wrong, namely, of finding herself, at the place and hour named by Charley in that plain-

tive missive of his, which had hitherto remained unanswered in a little shabby rose-wood desk (a relic of her girlhood's days), which it had never occurred to Guy to replace by one of the pretty "New Year's Gifts" at which, in the tempting shop-windows, Lizzie had often gazed with longing eyes.

"A little fire" it might be called, which has "kindled this great matter!" A hitherto not ill-intentioned young woman has taken her first deliberate step in sinning; and the "last feather," the atom of weight which turns the scale to evil, is, *mirabile dictu*, only the poor little butterfly's mortification in that its bright wings are not as bright as such light wings should be, and (a perhaps less important corollary), her angry reflection that it is owing to *his* fault—the fault of the man whose duty it is to worship her—that she has been exposed to the "degrading familiarity" of such a "person" as Mrs. Payne.

A silly, trivial-natured young woman, doubtless, and one of whom, as my heroine, I almost begin to feel ashamed; but still, for lack of a better, she must e'en play her part to the "end." Whether that end be "bitter" or not, remains to be seen.

"How good of you to come! I didn't expect you," Charley says, as he presses in his the small hand which Lizzie grieves to think is so very "badly gloved."

She laughs and blushes, and then, not being accustomed to *good* society, gives voice to a giggling platitude.

"Why did you come, then?" she asks; and Charley, understanding that his fair companion intends to be "funny," laughs too, as, looking into her clear blue eyes, he says,

"Well, there were a million chances to one against me, but I wasn't such a fool as to throw that one away."

"But," rejoins Mrs. Temple, who has been assured in Colonel Askew's note that he remained in London wholly and solely in the hope of seeing her, and who does not entertain the very faintest suspicion (as how indeed should she?) that her companion is kept in town—a good deal to his disgust—by military duty—"but," smiling with those fresh red lips of hers a little archly as she makes the suggestive remark, "if I hadn't come, how sorry you would have been that you refused some nice party!"

"Well, yes. I should have wanted some consolation, and I daresay I should have run down to Sunnyside—a nice, sentimental, honeymooning kind of name, isn't it? By the way, you'll be able to hear all about the party and the girls (uncommonly jolly they are!) when a friend of yours, who is staying there, comes home. For I suppose he tells you everything—doesn't he? I hope I haven't made any mischief," Charley adds; for, watching the fair,

innocent face which has always been to him a mystery of mysteries, he is more than ever puzzled by the expression which has stolen over Lizzie's speaking countenance.

She answers him hurriedly, and rather, as Charley thinks and hopes, as if the subject (that of Mr. Guy Temple, barrister-at-law, to wit) bores her just a little.

"You haven't made any mischief," she says. "What caused you to think such an unlikely thing? But I would rather hear about these people from you—these Miss Heywoods, I mean. I have known so few people, and literally *no* girls, that I want to learn how they can be what you call 'jolly.'"

"Oh, I don't know exactly," Charley, who longs to be making love, says. "They ride to hounds capitally, and sing comic songs, and draw horses as good as the *Punch* ones——"

"How odd that they should both do precisely the same thing!"

"Ah, but they don't. Leo caricatures wonderfully, and they will both have money——"

"And are they *both* handsome? In different styles, I hope, or there would really be too great a sameness at—— I forget the name of the place."

"Hazel Villa, Sunnyside—a nice, new, white stone house, standing in its own grounds—that is to say, with a drive ten yards long between laurel bushes to the house. You know the sort of place exactly."

"No—indeed I do not. I lived in a farmhouse always till almostthe very day before I saw you in the St. Malo Steamer; but," correcting herself suddenly, "you did not answer my question. I asked you if the Miss Heywoods are handsome?"

"*One* is—a plain likeness of a beautiful face, that has haunted me from the first moment I set eyes on it, and which will continue to haunt me till my dying day. Mrs. Fletcher, when do

you intend to give me your photograph?"

"Never!" laughing a fresh, natural laugh, but withal one that was very low and "rippling" —"never! It must be quite enough to be haunted by the reality; and as you, of course, know, there is a proverb which says that it is quite possible to have too much of even a good thing."

"And are you a *good* thing?" Charley, in a low voice, and throwing as much *meaning* as he can contrive to do into the question, asks. "A lovely one, I know you are; but were you ever told, as I believe all little girls are by their nurses, 'that it's better to be good than pretty?' I hope not. It *is* such a popular fallacy. I like the proverb better which tells us that 'handsome is as handsome does.' There is comfort in that for ugly dogs like me, who——"

She turns round upon him, a flush upon her fair face.

"You are *not* ugly, and you don't think so any more than I do. Oh! Colonel Askew, if you did but know how I hate humbug and deceit!—*men's* humbug and deceit, I mean," she goes on, almost passionately; "for women, poor creatures, must, it seems to me, unless they are contented to hope nothing, while they endure all things, be untruthful sometimes. But, Colonel Askew, please to tell me—I beg your pardon, though, for my rudeness, for it isn't civil, I know, to interrupt—but I do wish to know why you hope that no one told me, when I was little, that we should think more about being good than being pretty. For my part, I should like everybody to be good, and if they were, I feel sure that many more people would be happy than are happy now."

"Yourself included?" he asks, and the dark, deep-set eyes, from the searching gaze of which he at first felt well-nigh certain that *hers* would shrink, are now fixed in wondering admiration

on a face that never looked to him so free from guile before.

She answers him quite frankly, her blue eyes meeting his with the fearless, honest expression which we see more often in the orbs of a sensible, tender-hearted dog than of a human being who has learned the bitter lessons which deception and distrust can teach.

"Myself!—of course; for I can truly say that *all* the sorrow I have known has come from doing wrong, and from being discontented, ambitious, untruthful, and oh! *so* heartless! I don't know, though, why I tell you all this, only I *do* wish, more than I can ever say, that the old time—not so very long ago, *really*, though sometimes it seems ages off——"

"The time before you were so deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked?" he, quoting Scripture without being conscious of his profanity, laughingly inquires.

"Yes; only you wouldn't laugh if you knew

——But I *won't* be led on to say more than I ought to you. I came here to-day because I am so tired of being alone, and of thinking always the same miserable thoughts."

"But you are not *always* alone?—not always, as you say so piteously, thinking miserably?"

She looks so beautiful, with the sheen of tears brimming to her long dark lashes, and with the faint tremor of her rich red lips, which, like those of a chidden child, forebode the coming sobs, that Charley is only kept from uttering the words of tenderness which are on his tongue to speak, by the bewildering consciousness of being utterly in the dark, and surrounded by unseen yet vaguely-suspected obstacles—obstacles against which he may, by one false step, stumble fatally.

Lizzie is far too much engrossed with her own reflections to notice either the slight *quaver* in her companion's pleasant voice, or the fierce longing of the eyes, that are fixed, with an ex-

pression which she would find it hard to understand, on hers.

His question, however, is simple enough, and she endeavours, as best she can, to answer it.

"Not *quite* always—only when—but, Colonel Askew," turning her fair girlish face full upon him, "I *must* not reply to any more questions; only I *do* want you so *very* much," blushing deep crimson now, "not to think worse of me than I deserve. It is impossible to explain to you *now* how it is that I, that we—but what nonsense it all is! As if you could really care to know anything about me! And, besides, if you did——"

"*If* I did! Ah! Mrs. Fletcher, it is too late for you to pretend ignorance; too late, when you left your dull solitary home to-day (after reading a letter, every word of which, by Heaven! is true, to meet me here), to say that you expected me to be put off with—with con-

versation about the weather, and the silly nonsense of every-day talk."

Again the merry laugh rings out.

"We haven't said a word about the weather. Ought we to do so? I don't think it would be amusing; and I want *so* much to be brightened up."

He does not reply to this sally; and Lizzie, with the arch look of a born coquette, which—*soit dit, en passant*—I fear that she, as is the case with most attractive women, is, adds (the dangerous pitfall at the brink of which she stands being entirely hidden from her sight by the dazzle of the sunshine, and by the glory of the flowers which her fancy's eye sees growing, in spite of present desolation, on her future path), "You know, if you find me dull, you have only to go to Sunnyside, and see Miss Leo Heywood draw caricatures after *Punch*."

"And ask a few questions—what do you say to that, *ma mie*?—of Mr. Guy Temple. He is

at Hazel Villa. I heard so from the fair Leonora herself. Stay, I have her precious little note somewhere," and taking from his breast-pocket a tiny Russia-leather memorandum-book, he is about to open it in search of Miss Heywood's epistle, when Lizzie exclaims,

"Oh! please not to take the trouble. It does not matter to me in the very least; only if you should meet Mr. Temple *anywhere*, I shall be very grateful if you will say nothing to him about having seen me. *Promise*," she added, imperiously, "that you will never speak of me to any one—not even to your dearest friend."

"*Never;* if you will but trust me. I would keep, under torture, any secret of yours. I would indeed. You don't know me. I am getting to love you so desperately—as I never loved any woman upon earth before! Mrs. Fletcher——"

But she laid her hand upon his arm, and hardly noticing, in her agitation, that he has

taken her small fingers in his, and is pressing them with as much lover-like force as he dares to demonstrate, she says,

"Don't call me by that horrible name again! It isn't mine; and it makes me feel so ashamed. To have an *alias* always means, doesn't it, that you have done something disgraceful? And, another thing I want you to understand—I do indeed—is, that I am a person whom you *can't* love."

"*Can't* love! Good heavens!"

"Yes, we may like each other very much, and be good friends, and all that, but you mustn't say you love me."

"But I may love you without saying it?"

"No," shaking her head gravely, and looking, as Charley thinks, so bewitching that to obey her would be about as impossible as for a lion to lie down calmly with a lamb.

"And, in Heaven's name, *why?*"

"Because," colouring vividly, and then turn-

ing (as some of those fair women who are addicted to sudden blushing are wont to do) deadly pale—"because I am a married woman."

CHAPTER IV.

HE was very much surprised, and at first disappointment kept pace, I fear, with his wonder at these unexpected words. It was disenchanting, certainly. This slim, fair girl, with the shy, passionate eyes, which he had found so hard either to fathom or understand, to be a wife, appeared to Charley Askew as so strange an anomaly that he found it difficult to credit the revelation.

And yet he could not but believe her, the more especially when, after a few moments of "awkward" silence, she said timidly,

"You think it very strange, I see. But I thought it better to tell you, so far, the truth;

and, as I know that you will keep your promise——"

"If you tell me all! That was the compact —I hate half-confidences!" he went on, adopting that almost savagely autocratic tone which with some women is so strangely influential. "You must first tell me who you are, and what is your husband's name. It *cannot* be," a sudden idea occurring to him, an idea to which, had he taken a moment's time to reflect upon its utter absurdity, he would not, probably, have given voice—"It cannot *possibly* be Guy Temple?"

"And why not?" she asks, with a kind of desperate eagerness (for the tone in which her companion spoke has startled her horribly); and then, in *his* turn, as poor Lizzie gazes with widely-opened eyes into his face, Charley Askew understands that by the three words which have dropped from those sweet, trembling lips, a *guilty* secret has been divulged!

But, with the utterance of those seemingly

unoffending monosyllables, the almost conviction that Lizzie is the victim, *not* the sharer in this terrible dishonour, flashes across Colonel Askew's mind. He is, however, so startled by this sudden change in the aspect of the affair in hand (an affair, by the way, which, owing partly to its "surroundings" being slightly abnormal, had begun to assume a more lasting appearance than was usual with "affairs" in which Charley Askew bore part), that for a few moments poor Lizzie's question remained unanswered.

But even during that brief period of time there passes through Lizzie's excited brain a rush of possibilities, the *most* tangible of which is (though, so lightning-like flashes the phantasmagoria, that to lay hold of *any* one of its component parts is out of the question), that a previous marriage, one almost as secret as her own, but the *perpetration* of which was known to Colonel Askew, rendered her ill-fated union with Guy Temple illegal.

Impatience of suspense, and an eager longing to know the worst at once, are characteristic of the young; and Lizzie Temple, being no exception to the rule that it is only the "burnt child that dreads the fire," insisted, with a vehemence that brooked neither delay nor evasion, on learning the truth.

"*Why* is it impossible," she says, "that I should be Mr. Temple's wife? Colonel Askew, I implore—I *insist* on knowing what you meant by what you said just now. If you tell me it is nothing, a mere passing exclamation, implying that Guy" (in her agitation she called him unwittingly by his Christian name) "is not, in your opinion, a man likely to marry, I shall not believe you. I have known but few people, and have never lived in what is called the world, but I can read in your countenance that there is something you *could* tell me, only you are good-natured, and you don't like to do so. Now what *is* that something? Say it, or I

shall go home, and never see your face again."

Thus urged, what could this man (whose wild passions were "unslipped," and who, when he had once cried "havoc," was about the last man living likely to spare the victims of his predatory warfare) do but obey the mandate of the woman who, for the passing moment, had power to make the strong man weak as a reed within her hands?

I am afraid that to do her bidding did not cause him a *very* painful effort. "What was the 'fellow' to him?" "The brother of a brother officer!" "A man of whom he had always, if anything, 'fought shy.'" "A close-fisted, ungenial individual—not at all the sort of man whom one would go out of one's way for!"

These were amongst the reasons which Charley Askew would, had his lethargic conscience inquired of him how, as regarded Guy Temple's conduct, he was about to act, have given for betraying to a man's own wife the hitherto

well-kept secret that her husband had, by his clandestine marriage, forfeited all right to be treated as a man of honour.

But, small as was his liking for Guy Temple, and satisfied, as he could not but feel, that, were all his surmises to prove correct, the husband's loss of prestige could hardly fail to turn to *his* (Charley Askew's) advantage, the latter found the task of "telling" not quite so easy as he might have expected. It did not require many words to make poor Lizzie understand much that it had become necessary to impart to her. Almost before the fatal truth, told in terribly-sounding words—"You see that the moment a Fellow of a College marries, he forfeits his Fellowship"—had broken from Charley Askew's lips, the quick wit, sharpened by the previous suspicions of his auditress, had enabled her to seize upon the main facts, as they existed, against her husband. With her brow red with almost unbearable shame, she said, in a

low, faltering voice (they were her first words since Colonel Askew, with an unwillingness which was not all acted, commenced to do her bidding),

"Are people paid for being Fellows?" And when Charley, suppressing a smile at the simplicity of her question, replied in the affirmative, the girl set her lips close, and with a hard, resolute expression (one which changed them strangely) in her large blue eyes, she remained silent, whilst her companion made a lame attempt at an apology for the absent man.

"I always thought," he said, "that these Fellowships were an awful sell. A man gets used to having a certain income, and it's deuced hard then—don't you think so?—to do without it?"

She is looking straight before her, with head erect and defiant, as though she were preparing to do battle against the cruel enemy which the world would henceforth be to her. For a

dim notion—vague at present, and not yet moulded into shape—was gradually forcing itself into something tangible in her brain; and it being, as I have said, part and parcel of this girl's idiosyncrasy to rebel against suspense, she said, with an abruptness which rather disconcerted the Guardsman's tactics—

"I want you to answer me one more question, and then"—putting her hand to her forehead, which was throbbing violently—"I think I'll go home."

Her face was flushed, and there was a nervous quiver in her hands, that frightened Charley. Like the generality of his sex, he was far more ready to sympathise with slight physical suffering, the proofs of which he *saw*, than with the fiercest mental pain, the existence of which he, not understanding its nature, was obliged to take for granted. He felt almost sorry, now that it was too late, that, by pressing the poor girl so hard with questions, he had brought

about this most unexpected *dénouement.* He was terribly afraid, too, that she would faint, or go into hysterics, or, in short, betray some one of the many inconvenient weaknesses to which ladies, under emotional circumstances, were, according to his belief, liable. It would be a delicious task to soothe her. If their surroundings were not so thoroughly inappropriate, with what intense delight would he whisper to her tender words of consolation! It required no conjurer to divin ethat devotion to her husband had little to do with Mrs. Temple's present agitation, and very evidently real distress, and, it being with Charley Askew an article of faith that the woman who loves no longer has never loved at all, the present case was precisely the one in which (according to *his* view of such matters) a third party might, with considerable odds in his own favour, step in.

But "circumstances," over which he had for the moment "no control," were, as I before

said, decidedly against any present advantage being taken of the "situation." A broad-gravelled walk, flanked by a high park paling, broughams containing keen-eyed old ladies out for an airing, slowly-passing perambulators, propelled by novel-reading nursery maids, forcibly ejecting them (our especial pedestrians) from the path,—these, and such like hindrances to the display of sentiment, would alone, even if Lizzie had looked in the mood to be made love to, have put, in some sort, a bridle on Charley Askew's tongue. Wishing, however, to re-assure her by the conviction that she had in him a never-failing support and comforter, he said, in his most winning whisper,

"You are suffering, poor thing. What a brute I have been not to notice before that this hot sun——"

"Oh! it isn't that!" she exclaims impetuously. "It is that I am so afraid. I can't help dreading hearing you say that after *this*, Mr.

Temple will not be considered a gentleman any longer. Is this so? I would rather hear the truth at once," pleads poor Lizzie, who feels, poor foolish mortal, that if the verdict should be—as she fully expects will be the case—that Society and Guy Temple are henceforth to be at odds, life, and the things of life, will bear for her a widely different aspect from that which they have hitherto in her sight displayed. If her husband be not a "gentleman," "what good," Lizzie feels inclined to ask herself, "can her existence do her?"

Charley hesitates for a moment, and then says:

"It all depends whether or not the thing gets found out. The French proverb says, '*Ce n'est pas pécher que pécher en silence.*'"

"But if it *should* be known? Oh! *can't* you answer a plain question when it's asked you?" And, regardless alike of broughams and perambulators, and eke of a poulterer's boy, who

bearing a trussed fowl for boiling, and two plucked pigeons on his tray, stands still at ten yards off to watch her, Lizzie comes to a dead halt upon the *trottoir*, and stamps her small foot impatiently.

Charley feels half inclined to be angry. He has no key to his companion's besetting sin, and having no clue to what is passing in her mind, is almost beginning to fear that the "lawyer fellow," of whom *he* thinks so little, may not be altogether at a discount in the opinion of his wife.

The idea irritates him, and he answers accordingly,

"Well, if you *will* know—but mind, you are making me tell you——"

"I know. Go on," from Lizzie. "Would people cut him? Yes, or no?"

"*Yes*—I am afraid. But, dear Mrs. Temple, why, let me ask you, *should* people know? Surely," and then suddenly recollecting the

wheels within wheels which, in some complicated phases of social life make up its *delicate* machinery, he stopped abruptly, and changing the sentence which it was on his tongue to speak, added, "I conclude that *you* have not made many confidants in the matter? Tell me now honestly, if it be not asking too much, to whom, besides myself, have you revealed this mystery?"

"To one person *only*."

"And that one?"

"To Guy's blind brother, Reginald."

"One of his own family! And you expect the secret to be kept? Good Heavens! What a child you are!"

"You would not say so—I mean, you would not doubt Reginald Temple if you knew him—he is so good, so kind, so noble-hearted; and there is nothing he would not do to help me if he could."

The colour which Charley's "*Yes*" had ban-

ished from her cheeks, has, whilst speaking out her thoughts of Reginald, returned to them; and never during their brief acquaintance has the man who walks by Lizzie Temple's side (feeling—notwithstanding the flattering ease with which he has persuaded her to depart from the strict line of duty—a kind of reverential pity mingled with his passion) been more ready to acknowledge that of all the fascinating women whom he had ever admired or known, Guy Temple's strangely situated wife certainly bears away the palm.

"I am sure you are right," he says; "and you must forgive my haste. This is such a serious, such an extraordinary case. Not that I even pretend to be anxious for anyone concerned in it but yourself. To save *you* from worry and annoyance, there is nothing that I would not do—no pledge of secrecy that I would not take; but, as regards the man who has brought you into this fix, I shouldn't care,

if it wasn't for you—but *that* makes all the difference—if he were to be shown up to-morrow. And now tell me—for I cannot bear to see that despairing look upon your beautiful face—what I can do for *you*?"

"Nothing. I only wish that I were dead!"

"Dead!—with that glorious face? What, in the name of all that is preposterous, do you mean? Am I to understand," he added, almost savagely, for there is nothing which jerks a man's mind sooner off its balance than jealousy, "that it is love for your husband which has thrown you into this awfully desponding mood?"

She looks at him almost steadily for a moment or two, and then says, with a little bitter laugh,

"I don't seem to have gained much by trusting you with my secret. I came here to-day, partly, as I told you before, because I was wearied of my life, and felt as if I should go mad

if I did not make *some* change in it; but my chief reason for wanting to see you was that I might try and find out, from what you said, and your manner, and all that, whether it would be safe for me to try, by telling you I was married, to alter your opinion of me. And now what is it that you do? Instead of treating me as if I were a lady, which I am——"

"Oh! Mrs. Temple, how could you doubt my certainty of *that?*"

"Ah! but you don't know. Should you mind taking just one more turn?"

Mind it! Why, if the penalty of his taking that one "turn" were to be the loss of all the money he had ventured to risk upon the result of the "Derby," he would have said "Yes" to her proposal. *Mind* it! when he would have walked to the uttermost parts of the earth with her for his companion. The idea was simply ludicrous; and Charley, having duly expressed himself to this effect, the pair, nothing heeding

the encounter of the same gazing nursery-maids, to say nothing of the dowagers who had made the "round," and whose elderly eyes might, or might not—for *they* (the self-engrossed pedestrians) never troubled themselves about the matter—prove ultimately dangerous—turned their backs once more upon the road that led to Lizzie's unloved home.

And there—still flanked by the high park paling, and, as before, *guarded* by the Argus eyes of many chance passers-by—Lizzie told her simple story to about the last man in the world with whom it was expedient for her to open out her heart. And when all was said, she felt that she had found—most perilous consequence, in this instance, of trustfulness!—that rarest of all human possessions, a friend.

CHAPTER V.

"I AM so glad you agree with me; but I felt sure you would like The Firs. And furnishing and beautifying will be such fun."

And Mrs. Conrad Temple, who, with her husband and Sir Miles Grafton, had "run down" to inspect the new home on which Con's heiress wife had set her heart, actually executed, in the exuberance of her spirits, a lively *pas de dance* on the uncarpeted floor of the drawing-room.

It was certainly a charming place, standing, as its name implies, in the midst of pine woods, with here and there a grand old beech-tree

spreading its giant arms afar; and withal, there was much ornamental planting around the house, and great pains had evidently been taken by a previous occupant of The Firs to keep the woods and grounds in useful as well as in ornamental order.

"I am afraid that Laura will find very little to do," was Sir Miles's remark to Conrad, after they had gone, from "garret to basement," all over the house.

But what woman, with the slightest pretension to skill in decorative art, ever yet admitted that *she* could *not* improve upon the work which another woman had "attempted?" Hardly had Laura Temple passed the pretty lodge, covered with flowery creepers, when her busy fancy commenced its work—a tree planted *here*—a view of a church spire opened *there*—a diverging walk in *this* direction, and a new flower-garden in *that!* Ah! what an endless variety of amusement (provided there be a long purse

to fall back upon) may not a woman find in what it pleases her to call "making improvements." As regards the cost thereof, she too often—as was the case with wealthy Lolo—thinks of that but little. It is so *nice* to order lots of new things. So delightful to arrange them in their places when they come home. So pleasant to employ people, and feel that one is doing good; and above all, feels grateful Laura, it is such happiness to possess a husband who, instead of being supercilious, and sneering, and seeming (whether he does so or not) not to care what she is about, enters into everything with lively interest, and never appears to think she spends too much!

Which, in truth, *her* husband does not; for Colonel Temple has that very morning heard the good news that his speculation—or rather that of his good-natured friend—had turned up trumps, and that he (Con) is the fortunate possessor of twenty thousand pounds! He says nothing about

his good fortune to Laura. A delicacy of feeling, with which the "world" would not perhaps credit the heir-entail of Temple Court, causes in his mind an undefined impression that *his* dislike to owing everything to her would in some way jar against his wife's feelings; and if the truth must be told, Conrad would not much object to Laura's getting slightly into monetary trouble, and being compelled to come to *him*—her lawful protector—for help. But, be this as it may, Colonel Temple is, on this especial day, almost as elated in spirit as his wife. He has paid with a portion of his own *fortune* the purchase-money of The Firs; and, with that spice of romance in his nature which is so rare in full-grown manhood, the idea is just occurring to him that "some day" it will not be "half bad fun" to make a present of The Firs to Lolo, when he is surprised by hearing that young person, who, as a rule, never abuses anyone, remark to Sir Miles,

"I'm sorry I asked him—*very*. I quite agree with you that he is detestable——"

"And that is not the only fault he has," growled Sir Miles. "But, my dear Laura, I will forgive Mr. Hart Davison everything, if you will only let me off——"

Laura laughs *à gorge déployée*. "As if that were likely," she cries. "And such a bribe, too! As if I wanted the horrid man to be forgiven!"

"You are terribly severe upon your old admirer," says Sir Miles, dryly, as, trying to make himself at home on a window-seat, he nurses one thin knee upon the other, Conrad, meanwhile, standing by with an amused smile upon his handsome face.

"Mr. Davison never did admire me," Lolo says stoutly; "and you know as well as I do, Sir Miles, that it's nonsense to say so. He wanted my money, and his uncle coveted it for him too."

"His uncle!—I like that," puts in Conrad, laughing.

"Well, we won't mind *who* he is," Laura (who has no taste for that *line* of female "fastness" which consists of allusions such as that in which Colonel Temple has just indulged) rejoins. "We know (which is quite enough for us) *what* he is—namely, so disagreeable that I ought never to have asked him to dine with us to-day. I am very sorry now that I did so; but it can't be helped, and I expect that everyone" (with a playful little nod at both her companions as she left them in order to inspect alone the kitchen and cellars of The Firs) "will behave themselves as well as they can."

"How about your brother Reginald?" asked Sir Miles, when the two men, the younger with the inevitable cigar in his mouth, were left—(inhaling fresh air from the widely-opened window)

—alone. "I like that boy," continued the Baronet, "and I quite hoped we should see a good deal of him during the fortnight that you and Laura propose to pass in town."

"So did I, and I am quite puzzled to know what Regy is after. He has promised to dine with us to-day, when I shall try and get something out of him."

"What do you say to his being in love, poor fellow?"

"Poor fellow, indeed! No, I must say that *that* has never occurred to me as likely to happen."

"And why not? Because a man happens to be deprived of *one* sense, it needn't follow that all the others must be in abeyance."

"Well, but Regy doesn't seem—don't you know?—the kind of fellow to get spoony——"

"In *your* opinion, my dear fellow, but *I* think differently, and I've my reasons for it, too, which I will tell you, if you will promise to say

nothing to the lad about what I am going to say."

"Certainly I won't," Conrad answers, carelessly. He is so convinced that, on *this* subject, at least, Sir Miles *can* have nothing either interesting or original to say, that the promise is given almost mechanically. Regy in love! The idea is one that he finds it impossible, even for a single moment, to entertain.

"You will be astonished, as I was, only not so much so, because you are prepared—excuse the Hibernianism—to be startled. The fact is that I met your brother Reginald walking yesterday, in a quiet street near Portland Place, with—whom do you think?"

"Old Dixon, probably; but I am a bad hand at guessing."

"No such thing. The 'party' was a very handsome young woman, with dark eyebrows, and a quantity of beautiful fair hair. Does that tell you nothing? To me, though I con-

fess to feeling very sorry when I made the discovery, the girl looked uncommonly like old John Beamish's niece, pretty Lizzie Fairholme of the Lees."

Conrad is for the moment thoroughly taken aback. To doubt the reality of Sir Miles' vision is impossible. The worthy man, who has just, by a few lightly-spoken words, shaken the edifice of a faith stronger, I fear, than that which Conrad Temple feels in Holy Writ, is one of those clear-sighted, slow-going people who can rarely be convicted of a mistake; and if it were true that Regy, the blind brother, who has been till now, in Conrad's sight, as a very emblem of virtue, and purity, and truth, is not only cognizant of the whereabouts of the girl whose disappearance has caused so much sorrow to her family, but is in the habit of taking clandestine walks with the *lost* one, why, then, farewell, on Conrad Temple's part, to all future belief in any soul that lives.

"Reginald and Lizzie Fairholme together! It seems hard to believe," he says, and Sir Miles (a man at no time over-quick of perception, and who, besides, as we have heard him say, having a "liking for the lad," entertains for him none of the almost reverential feelings with which those who have been familiarly associated with Reginald Temple are more or less inspired) fails to notice, to its full extent, the outward effect which his intelligence has produced on his auditor. Colonel Temple seems astonished, certainly, but as *that* was a consequence which Sir Miles (one of the kindest-hearted of men) intended to produce, he would have been somewhat disappointed had his communication failed in producing the sensation which he expected. As "the world goes," Sir Miles was a good man, but that "young men will be young men," was, to his thinking, one of those patent facts on which to reason is simply waste of time.

So he says quietly, and as if the affair were one of every-day occurrence,

"I thought you would be rather surprised. I was not a little so myself, I can tell you, when I saw them first. Of course there was no danger of my being recognized by *him*, poor fellow! and the girl (she was looking handsomer than ever, though poorly dressed, I could see that at a glance) was much too busy talking, to notice any passers-by. Rather unfortunate, though, altogether, isn't it? But what will you do? *Il faut que jeunesse passe!*" And then, hearing Laura's rapid step advancing on the *parquet* floor towards them, the subject was with tacit accord dropped.

It was characteristic of the two men that neither the one asked, nor the other volunteered any information regarding the exact locality where the imprudent pair were seen. Conrad's anxiety to learn the truth—for he could ill bear the threatened shattering of the Temple Court

Penates—was extreme. Nevertheless, to seek for any information, save from the lips of Reginald himself, never for a moment entered his head.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was a touching little letter of appeal from Lizzie that had brought Reginald Temple to London.

"You promised me," the girl wrote, "that if I were in any trouble or difficulty you would come to my aid. No poor creature could want help more than I do now. Oh! Mr. Reginald, won't you come and save me?"

This was all. There was no signature, so that the faithful Dixon, who read it aloud to his young master, could only guess—which probably he did—from whom the short but comprehensive epistle came.

The appeal reached Reginald only the day before the visit of Conrad and his wife to Temple Court, and, as we have seen, he lost no time in endeavouring to do his young sister-in-law's bidding.

Many months—for it was now the middle of September—had elapsed since Regy had either seen or heard from the poor weak vessel whose position, subjected as she was, through its peculiarity, to so many trials and temptations, had kept him, ever since he had become aware what that position was, in a continual fever of anxiety—of anxiety in which (for wrestle as valiantly as he would, and did, with human thoughts and wishes, the spirit could not always obtain the mastery over the flesh) a cruel jealousy was often so confusedly entwined and mingled in his breast, that Regy, bewildered and beaten down, would sometimes doubt whether, in his ardent wish to save and serve his brother's wife, he was actuated by *one* really

pure and Christian motive; whilst the searching question, which, in the course of rigid self-examination, he sometimes asked himself—the question, namely, of whom, whether of his own brother, or of Charley Askew, he was so madly jealous—filled him (so conscious was he of his own—in his opinion—exceeding sinfulness) with shame unutterable.

Since the interview—with the details of which the Reader is already acquainted—Reginald Temple had only once, and that for a short half hour at the most, found himself in the presence of his sister-in-law. According to a promise which she had then made, Lizzie had sent to him, when her place of abode was changed, her new address, in consequence of which he was enabled, when in search of medical advice, he, in the month of June following, visited London, to call at Number 13, Well Street, on "Mrs. Fletcher."

The short interview proved to be both a try-

ing and an unsatisfactory one. Lizzie had not spoken three words before the quick ear of her visitor enabled him to discover that she was changed. The "ring of truth," which, notwithstanding the deceptions she had practised, had been in her voice *before*, was wanting now; and in all she said there was an undefinable *something* which betrayed to Reginald that the girl who, when he had last talked to her, had kept *nothing* back, was acting a part now.

To endeavour to force her confidence would have been impossible for Reginald—as impossible as it was for him to peer with those poor sightless orbs of his into the blue depths of her glorious eyes. It was strange, though, what a vivid picture he, in his mind's eye, drew of her. Till now he had always thought of Lizzie as dressed simply like a country-bred girl, in delicately-tinted muslins—blue, or palest rose colour; whereas now, possessing no power, as it seemed to him, over his truant imagination, he pictured

her to himself (after a portrait he had once seen) as a gorgeously-attired lady, in a silken dress, with a necklace round her perfect throat, and a circlet of ruby velvet contrasting with the creamy whiteness of her arms.

As he sat listening to the low, sweet voice, uttering unmeaning platitudes, the unhappy lad, totally unable to replace by *reality* the vivid picture which Fancy (over which he had for the moment entirely lost control) had placed before him, felt his brain begin to turn (you must remember, indulgent Reader, that Lizzie had been his only love) beneath the strain which it was called upon to endure. In flight appeared to him his sole escape from the danger of speaking forbidden words—words which only a brief madness could have wrung from him; and therefore, with an abruptness for which Lizzie strove in vain afterwards to account, he rose to say "good-bye."

"You are not going already, surely?" Lizzie

asked. "You have hardly sat down, and I have so much to say to you."

But he was not to be persuaded. His temples throbbed to bursting, and in little gasps, holding her hand in his, he managed to stammer out, "Thanks—not now. But if you should ever want me, ever be in trouble, and feel you want a friend, do not forget that there is one at Temple Court who only lives to be of service to you."

She promised to bear his words in mind; and the next moment his place was empty.

True though the words were, and spoken out of the fulness of his heart, yet Regy did most *devoutly* (I use the word advisedly) hope and pray that it might be long before such another trial as that which he had just gone through would be meted out to him. In the meantime, the poor lad wrestled hard, and "not as one that fighteth the air," with the enemy that did oppress him. The combat was

a long and arduous one, but he won, poor lad, the costly victory, and thenceforth

> The phantoms of his soul had fled
> Into the night, and *he* was left alone
> With that deep sadness which doth ever dwell
> Upon the brink of tears!

It will, methinks, surprise none of my hearers to learn that the hearing of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as regarded her story from Lizzie Temple's lips, did not in the least degree tend to relax the "pursuit" of her which Charley Askew—when labouring under a widely different impression regarding his beautiful *trouvaille*—had commenced.

But though still determined (*so* determined, indeed, that his intended victim would have shuddered with positive fear could she have overheard the fierce vows he swore to himself anent her) that she should not escape his snares, Lizzie's wily and experienced confidant drew this deduction from his better knowledge of her

character—the deduction, namely, that Guy Temple's wife was still far too pure of heart for any hasty measures on his part to be productive of aught save ruin to his cause.

Notwithstanding the "pull," as Charley would have phrased it, in his favour, which Guy's despicable conduct, as regarded both his own and his wife's honour, gave to his would-be supplanter in Lizzie's affections, the latter's unprincipled admirer could not, for many a day after he had learned the full and true particulars of Mrs. Temple's history, flatter himself that he had done much more than open the preliminaries of battle.

I recollect (the anecdote is recalled to me by my heroine's situation) hearing, not long ago, of a New York gentleman—one of the golden youth of that luxurious City (a Duc de Richelieu, perhaps, in his way)—who, after having avowedly spent a year in devotion to a young married lady (following in her footsteps, not only

across the Atlantic, but over the greater part of the Continent of Europe), was asked on his return, by a treacherous friend, how his fortunes sped.

"Well," responded the Yankee, *nasalling* (if I may be allowed to coin the word) from the depths of the rocking-chair in which, with a sherry-cobbler beside him, he was taking his evening exercise—"well, I guess I've lowered her moral tone *con*-siderably."

Now, although to affirm that *no* portion of the deterioration alluded to by the "Delmonico" dandy had as yet alloyed the innate purity of Lizzie Temple's nature, would be devoid of truth, there remained for her a safeguard, unshaken hitherto, which might be for her a "very present help in time of danger." Of the *three short* commandments which, in comparison with the other seven, are rarely by professing Christians broken —*the* three which, standing as they do in the Church Catechism in battle array together, were in our

childhood's days so easily repeated, there was not *one* (as yet) which Lizzie in the depths of her still innocent heart, felt it possible (beset though she was by her new friend's dangerous sophistries) that she could ever be brought so low as to infringe.

I hardly think it was altogether to "Religion"—so-called, that the keeping of this young wife so far *straight* was owing. It was partly pride (for our evil qualities sometimes stand us in good stead, and the loss of "caste" would be, as we well know, in this young woman's estimation, a terrible thing) which caused her, sometimes for several weeks together, to utterly snub, and often refuse even to see the man who "loved her beauty"—there could be no doubt on *that* score—"passing well." As a rule, it was almost solely when Guy made himself especially disagreeable that Lizzie permitted her thoughts to dwell dangerously on the vast superiority of the man who was *not* her

husband to the one who was. Should she, however, *fall* now, it will be no longer in ignorance of the precipice before her that she will take the fatal step, for Lizzie understands at last that there is peril in her path.

The facility and quickness with which the habit of deceiving had become, as it were, second nature to this girl, who, before she was tempted (for the sake of gratifying her silly ambition) to *lie* to her best and oldest friend, had been, as Farmer Beamish sometimes boasted, "as honest-speaking a gell as you'd wish to see," ought alone to have been sufficient to teach her the truth of the proverb that *facilis descensus Averni.* And Lizzie Temple, as I have just said, was so taught—and although unable, especially when Guy was cross or rude, or when she felt *very* tired of her own society—to always resist the temptation of allowing Charley Askew to join her in her walks, she attempted to excuse herself on the plea, not only that her husband

deserved to be deceived, but that—as she was only amusing herself, and that Colonel Askew, knowing that she was a married woman, could only behave towards her as a friend—no harm could accrue to anyone from her conduct.

And after this fashion, and with Lizzie complacently holding these convictions, matters went on quietly enough for awhile—went on, in short, till the fact that Charley not only intended, but was felt by her to be, something more than a friend, began to make itself only too apparent to both. Colonel Askew had long chafed against the hitherto seemingly insurmountable difficulty of persuading Lizzie to meet him elsewhere, save in what he contemptuously called the "high road." He had used arguments without end to induce her, when the husband who had so greatly wronged her, and for whom she did not even profess to care, should be *well* out of the way, to vary the scene of her daily exercise, but in vain. The keen

instinct that "scents" danger from afar, and which is given to the weak for their protection, endowed this foolish girl with just enough of prudence to enable her for a time, at least, to turn a deaf ear to plans for her *amusement*, which, under less exceptional circumstances, would certainly have found much favour in her sight. For Lizzie dearly loved the country, and all that to it belonged. To her the delight of wandering at "dewy eve" beneath the fragrant shade of ancient hawthorns, would be only equalled by just such a row upon the moonlit river as Colonel Askew proposed, that, on some lovely day in June, when Guy Temple would be away in Circuit, he (Charley), and the wife whose lonely hours were so many, should enjoy together.

"I can't—indeed you must not tempt me—I should be so afraid!" she says. But her eyes sparkle, and, like a child that dreams of a gladsome holiday, she cannot hide the long-

ing which she feels for this great pleasure.

"Afraid!—of what?" he whispers; and for the first time, the fair cheek that is so near his own blushes hotly (for the subtle poison is beginning to act) beneath a gaze the meaning of which a "girl of the period" would not have taken a hundredth part of the time to understand.

"Not of *me*, surely?" he continues. "You ought to know by this time that your slightest wish is law to me, and I can see by your face that you would like the drive to Bushey Park on Thursday—is it not so?—and an hour's boating on the river? You have so little to amuse you. How you can endure it is more than I can understand."

Lizzie, who holds in her hand a sprig of flowering lilac, which she has bought of a street flower-girl, laughs a little sadly, as she rejoins,

"I don't pretend to say that I find it cheerful in Well Street; and then to have the

Spring and Summer go by without having flowers to see and smell! It seems so unnatural, and the stuffiness of that horrid house will seem stuffier still, while the scent—how delicious the perfume is!—of those sweet lilac-flowers reminds me of my dear old home."

"You should have had a fresh bouquet every day—the best that Covent Garden could produce, only it would not, you told me, have been safe."

She interrupts him almost passionately.

"How you must despise me!" she exclaims, "for all these mean, deceiving tricks, and how different I must seem to the *ladies*" (Lizzie's fixed idea, you see, is cropping up again!) "whom you are accustomed to. I wonder whether I shall ever be like them?—ever be able to——But what a goose I am to talk in this way! It makes me feel as I do when I am alone; and when I am with you, I like everything to be different!"

On this "hint"—one, however, which was certainly not intended to be taken as such—Charley returned to the subject of the "excursion," on which he had set his heart. To repeat the arguments he used, and the entreaties with which he endeavoured to enforce them, would be worse than needless. Suffice it to say that Lizzie sometimes playfully, but always to appearance steadfastly, refused to agree to his proposal, insomuch that Charley, to whom non-success was as novel as it was unpleasant, had begun, when a few drops of rain suggested the wisdom of bringing the *tête-à-tête* to a close, to show incipient signs of sullenness.

When they found themselves within a couple of hundred yards of Lizzie's abode, Colonel Askew, in a polite, conventional way, says, as he shakes hands with her,

"I must wish you good-bye now, for a long time, I fear. I am thinking of taking a fellow's duty in Dublin——"

He is not allowed to proceed, for Lizzie strikes in (conventional laws being decidedly at a discount with *her)* almost vehemently—

"Going away! Oh! Colonel Askew, you cannot mean it? And you the *only* friend I have!"

She looks piteously in his face, her sweet lip quivering, but the present is no moment, as Charley, who has his senses tolerably under control, comprehends, for yielding. He has played his trump card, and is not going, if he knows it, to throw away the game. He speaks coldly at first, for he did not wish to conceal from Lizzie that her refusal had greatly angered him.

"If you could tell me," he says, "any good that my remaining here can do, I will give up, at the cost of any inconvenience to myself, going to Dublin now; but when you make me feel—yes, *feel*, and very cruelly, too, that you do not trust me, that you cannot consider me as a friend—what is the use, as I said before, of my

living the life that tries me"—he was going to say "like the devil," but he checked himself in time, and substituted the words, "which makes me miserable, and is of no earthly use to you?"

For a moment or two she was silent, but none the less did Charley Askew feel persuaded that "the day" was gained! The master-stroke of policy, none the less efficient from being old and often tried, did not fail, in the case of this inexperienced young woman, to do its normal work. Her life, till Guy Temple made his appearance on the scene, had been so completely the reverse of sensational, and it had so seldom fallen to her lot to "play a part," that, when called upon to display her proficiency in that eminently useful branch of female education, she broke down deplorably. All the more deplorably, and with a more hopeless collapse, for the reason that then and there Lizzie Temple first made the discovery that she loved the man

whom she had just, in such piteous accents, implored not to leave her to her fate!

The threatened rain has come to nothing, and once more Lizzie is walking slowly under the shade of the fresh green trees, with the tempter lingering by her side. The experience of the last ten minutes (for a not much longer space of time has elapsed since Lizzie shuddered over the fear that the friend in whom she so rashly trusted would "leave her in this bleak world alone") has worked a great change (one in which Charley—being not slow to notice—greatly rejoiced), not only in this impulsive girl's countenance and manner, but in the thoughts and feelings which it is so little in her power to disguise. As little able to disguise as to subdue and keep in order; for before the beautiful face, bearing still the traces of emotions such as Lizzie had never in her lifetime known till now, was once more turned home-

ward, she had given the promise—as her companion phrased it—"to permit herself, for an hour or two, to be happy!"

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CHAPTER VII.

IT may appear strange, but nevertheless the fact is so, that with the discovery that she loved the man whom she had so long called her friend, there came also to Lizzie her first true and real sense of guilt, in that she had deceived her husband. The cause of this conjunction of feeling may possibly have been this, that now, for the first time, Mrs. Temple believed herself to be weak, and on a sense of weakness, humility, and eke contrition, do sometimes follow.

On her return from her walk, she found a short note from Guy, in which he informed her that it was his pleasure to dine that day in

Well Street. There was a postscript to the effect that "Miss B." was rather worse than better.

Now, on the receipt of this marital epistle, it clearly behoved Mistress Lizzie to lose no time in making sure that a repast infinitely better than would have sufficed for her would be in readiness for her autocrat. This, however, she—partly from pre-occupation of mind, and also because, as she afterwards told Guy, the postscript gave her something else to think about—neglected to do, and therefore—but this is forestalling—the meal provided by Mrs. Payne was certainly, to say the least of it, not appetising.

Meanwhile, Lizzie, with a book in her hand, which she did not even attempt to read, gave herself up, as she sat in the only tolerably comfortable chair (the chair consequently which she would be expected, on his entrance, to give up to Guy) which the "second floor parlour"

contained, and delivered herself up to thought.

To thoughts which ran no risk of being dull and unexciting now, for not only had her relations with Charley Askew assumed a novel, and, certainly, a not *tamer* character, but there was the daily increasing chance of Miss Bainbridge's death making ere long a very decided change in her (Lizzie's) existence. Both before and since his marriage, Guy had made no secret of the fact that *the* one of his "people" whose disapprobation of his conduct he had the most cause to fear, was his godmother and cousin, the rich old maid, with whom he lived as a son, and who all but acknowledged him in gloomy, respectable Gloucester Place to be her heir. At *her* death—at least, so had Lizzie been taught to think—her own marriage would be made public, and the longed-for days of her *ladyhood* would begin. In the early period of her married life, when her conscience was more tender than it afterwards became, she had more than once re-

proached herself for a feeling—which *almost* amounted to a wish, check it sharply as she might—that Miss Bainbridge would soon die, and leave her riches to others; and now—now when the poor old lady was about—according to report, at least—to go ere long the way of all flesh, lo! young Mrs. Temple, instead of being in the slightest degree elated at the thought, found herself almost wishing that things could go on as they were.

Nor can we, when we remember that Lizzie was *now* acquainted with Guy's strongest of all reasons for concealing his marriage, be surprised that so it should be. Since that terrible discovery of her husband's shame had burst upon Lizzie's mind, a feeling which at times almost amounted to loathing, was added to the contempt with which her husband had before contrived to inspire her. And it was to this man, as she often told herself, that she was bound for life; whilst to save him from open shame it was

more than probable that the sacrifice of her reputation would be demanded!

"Were Miss Bainbridge to die to-morrow, and leave Guy £5,000 a year" (this was the bitter thought which tortured poor Lizzie's busy brain), "*I* should be none the better for it. The date of our marriage must still remain, *if possible*, a secret; and—well, any way, shame *must* fall, in some shape or other, on the innocent." And the unhappy young woman, who had lately begun to suspect that another and a more guiltless life than hers might be blighted by the cruel complication of mysteries which Guy Temple's wickedly deceptive conduct had brought about, leant her languid head, adorned with its rich masses of fair hair, against the well-besmoked antimacassars (adapted as a precautionary measure by careful Mrs. Payne), and gave way to a flood of weary tears.

I greatly fear that some of my readers—charitable ones to boot—may, when they learn

that this young wife (who is already chargeable with more than enough of faults and shortcomings) feels none of that inward rejoicing at the thought of becoming a mother, of which poets and novelists have written more than enough, will be still more strongly prejudiced against her. In her excuse I have but little to urge, save that, in the first place, her path, poor child, is beset with much difficulty and trial; and, in the next, that "love," as the French saying has it, "*ne se commande pas!*"

Whether the creature whom she is expected to love *by order* be the husband who *morally* tortures her, or the child who physically causes the extreme of discomfort to the woman whose duty it is to *endure*, I still venture boldly to maintain that for her to do *more* than patiently submit ought not to be required of her, and will not be so.

But, be this as it may, it is certain that poor Lizzie, instead of being cheered by the prospect

before her, felt that the news which she would one day be compelled to impart to her husband would be fully as unwelcome to him, as the discovery of her situation had been *worrying* to herself. Guy's temper had been growing terribly irritable of late. One cause of which (the only one that he revealed to her, for he was not, as we know, of a communicative disposition) was to be found in his increasing money difficulties. To young men of a self-indulgent turn, and to those especially who under no circumstances would have shown an aptitude for "cutting their coats according to their cloth," *vague* expectations—of the kind which had, for some time past, been keeping Guy Temple afloat—are generally the reverse of blessings. I would not, however, desire the reader to infer that Master Guy was in difficulties on a large scale. The man had not in his system enough "go" for that. The one mad act of worse than imprudence, of which Lizzie's glorious beauty was the

cause, had been followed by no other acts of lunacy. As we have seen, he fitted up no golden cage for the bright bird which he had caught and caged. On the contrary, it tolerably soon came to be more on his own *ménus plaisirs* than on hers that he expended his superfluous cash. To a woman possessed of a *quantum suff.* of spirits, the being made to *feel* that the expense of her board and lodging is held a grievance by the man who pays for the same, is a state of things very hard to endure patiently; and during the past months there had been moments not a few when Lizzie's proud nature revolted so passionately against the bitter sense of mortification, that she was ready to accept almost any fate sooner than submit any longer to the trials which she had in a great measure brought upon herself. And then would come the perilous comparisons—"*He* would not be rude and unkind to me!" "*He* would not grudge me pleasure, and think

nothing of leaving me, day after day, and evening after evening, alone!"

Silly talk this! The talk of a woman who has never asked herself (in other words) the pithy question,

> "Think you if Laura had been Petrarch's wife,
> He would have written sonnets all his life?"

"To *have*, or not to *have*, that is the question?" *L'avant et l'après!* Ah! me, to think that the lover from whose lips fall only words sweet as his own kisses, would, were he to step into the crabbed husband's shoes, become, in all probability, quite as matter-of-fact, if not indeed as great a "brute" and "curmudgeon" as ever tried the temper of a good woman, or tormented an ill-disposed one into guilt!

The traces of tears were still visible on Lizzie's long, dark eyelashes, when a knock at the door, struck by no patient hand, causes her to start, and if not actually to tremble—for she has good country-bred nerves—at least to

breathe somewhat short and pantingly. For, alas! Lizzie, during the two hours that she has passed in that not very healthy reverie, has forgotten all about Guy's note, and now there flashes before her mental vision the horrible truth that *her* evening meal is to consist *only* of tea, a Yorkshire cake (Lizzie has a weakness for Yorkshire cakes, and likes them well buttered), and some of that excellent and refreshing vegetable known to worthy Mrs. Payne as "creases."

What is to be done? Literally nothing, for the foot which has not, it is to be feared, much "music in it" for Mrs. Temple, is already "on the stairs;" and, rising from her chair, with rather a guilty look on her fair flushed face, she comes forward to greet the husband whom for three days—for Guy had again been visiting his friends at Sunnyside—she had not set eyes on.

They kiss one another, of course—the quiet,

unemotional salute of long-wedded married people; and Lizzie is nineteen, with her blood full of wild unrest, and with a longing in her heart for the love which in some women

> "Is born in them—with them so intense,
> It is their very spirit—not a sense!"

"It has been such a lovely day!" she stammers, "that I stayed out late, and—I am so sorry—I forgot to say anything about your dinner."

To her surprise and relief, for she felt overwrought, and as if a hasty or even a loud word might be the signal for her tears to flow again, Guy took no notice of a confession which, had not his mind been pre-occupied, would certainly have called forth some not wholly undeserved reproach.

"Where have you been all day?" he asks. "I wanted to see you, and left the note myself—a great nuisance, as I had to walk all the way back to Belgravia to do a commission

about some stupid worsted-work for my mother."

"Perhaps it was for Reginald," Lizzie says. "You told me once that he amuses himself, poor fellow, with woman's work now. But, Guy, something is the matter, I am sure—what is it? Is Miss Bainbridge much worse? or have you had bad news from Temple Court?"

He is standing with his back towards her, his broad, rather stooping shoulders obscuring the light that struggles through the ill-cleaned window through which he is gazing. You may be sure that Lizzie contrasts not only *them* (*id est*, the shoulders), but the man's position, and his slowness in responding to her questions, with the slight, well set-up figure, and the *hanging* upon her every word, which are characteristic of that other man, who, if he were her husband, would probably conduct himself very much as Guy is doing. It is so "rude," she says to herself, not to answer her; and if she

has felt before, remembering her fatal promise, some twinge of conscience, those prickings of the half-forgotten monitor within have (under this fresh provocation) ceased for a while from troubling her.

At last he speaks, but his words, in which thought for *himself* alone is manifested, have reference solely to that well-loved one.

"I must dine at the Club, it seems," he, without looking round at his young wife, remarks. "It is a bore, because it costs money, and—but," feeling in his empty pockets, "I have forgotten my purse—left it in my evening coat. However, you can lend me a sovereign," he adds, facing about so as to confront the flushed cheek and curling lip of the girl who so utterly despises him for a selfishness of which he is simply unconscious.

"Indeed I can't," she answers boldly—for Lizzie is one of those women who can for a "spurt" be very valiant, but who collapses en-

tirely when the spur of excitement no longer pricks the sides of her intent. "You might just as well ask me for a thousand-pound note, if there are such things," and she laughs, to quote a French expression, *du bout des lèvres*, as she draws from her pocket a tiny and rather shabby *porte-monnaye*. "There," she says, as Guy thinks, defiantly, a conclusion which does not improve his temper, "I possess exactly ninepence halfpenny—two silver pieces, and the rest in copper, and if you can dine upon that——"

"Don't be absurd!" he breaks in angrily. "You take such wrong times to be facetious and witty——"

"Do I? I haven't much choice in the matter," Lizzie retorts bitterly. "It is rather praiseworthy of me, I think, to be facetious at all."

He looks at her with an expression that is nearly akin to wonder in his light grey eyes.

There is a change, but one which he is quite incapable of analysing, in this girl who has hitherto appeared to take life so quietly that not a shadow of fear lest any ill-conduct or imprudent proceedings on her part might increase the difficulties with which *he* has to contend, has ever yet crossed his path. Hitherto—so entire has been his conviction that either Lizzie's devotion to himself, or her freedom from the vice of coquetry, or some equally invaluable safeguard, renders her invulnerable to the shafts of other men's admiration—that the danger of leaving her so much alone is one which he has completely ignored. Guy has, in short, believed so entirely both in himself and his wife, that, if his story ends by his losing her, it will be no more than he has a right to expect.

He looks at her, as I before said, for a few moments wonderingly, and then says,

"I should like to know what you have done with all that money I gave you?"

"*All* that money! Oh, Guy, it was more than a fortnight ago, and only five pounds then! If you will look at Mrs. Payne's book, you will see that it is not my fault. I don't *think*"—in a lowered tone—"that I have had *all* the things she puts down."

"Not half of them, I'll be bound," Guy says, more amiably—so much more amiably, indeed, and the change in his tone is so sudden that Lizzie in her turn is puzzled what to think. "Most of these women who let lodgings are such confounded cheats that it makes one quite long to get out of their clutches."

"Indeed it does," Lizzie, falling at once into the trap, says. "And, Guy, do you know, I am almost sure she is beginning to think we have not much money left——"

"She is about right there," Guy breaks in cheerfully; for he has conceived an idea, capable, as he hopes and expects, of taking the sting, for the present, at least, out of *that* melancholy

fact. "The truth of the matter, my dear Lizzie, is" (and Guy, having made himself as comfortable in the chair vacated by his wife as circumstances admitted of, began rather nervously playing with the fringe of her tunic as she stood near him)—"the truth of the matter is, that we cannot by any possibility go on living in this way any longer."

"Really? I am so glad!"

"Humph! I hope you will say so when you hear more. One reason, I must tell you, why I thought of dining here to-day was that we might talk this matter over together. But, in the first place, you must answer me a question or two. Where does your uncle, Mr. Beamish, imagine you to be now?"

"With an English family in France. Is it not horrible? Dear old man! One of the chief reasons for my being glad that the mystery is, as you say, coming to an end, is that *then* there

will be no longer any necessity for deceiving him."

She speaks quite confidently, for in truth she has for the moment forgotten the "complication" which renders Guy's future and her own so terribly difficult to unravel. There is, too, a lively assurance in her tone, which, whilst it raises a wild panic in her husband's breast, provokes him exceedingly to wrath. Springing from his seat with a bound which must, Lizzie thinks, have set the lodger in the room below marvelling greatly what *could* be going on above stairs, Guy, *fixing* his wife sternly, says, in a fierce whisper,

"It seems to me that you don't know the least what you're saying. The mystery, as you call it, is not very much more likely to come to an end now than it was nine months ago; and as to not going on deceiving your uncle, that's just what I'm coming to. We've come to that point (and there's no mincing the matter any

longer) that you *must* go back to the Lees——"

"I—go—back—to—the—Lees!" she literally gasps; whilst Guy, nothing heeding the interruption, continues—

"Yes, there is no help for it. You must be supposed to have lost your—what d'ye call it? —situation—Gad! how low it all sounds!—and to be tired of your governess freak. After that, I suppose that nothing can be easier than for you to remain at your uncle's. Don't you think so? Eh? Why can't yon speak?"

For a moment or two, she literally *cannot* answer him; but suddenly her tongue seems loosened, and her words pour forth like a torrent.

"You ask me if I will go back as Lizzie Fairholme to the Lees; and I say 'No' to that ten thousand times! Why, what a mean, disgraceful creature you must think me! Back to the Lees! Guy, you must be mad even to think of such a thing!"

"And *you* must be mad, or worse, to speak to me in this way. I tell you I have no money left; and there is no course left for us but the one that I propose. Now, what do you say to *that?*"

"Just what I said before—I *will* not do it."

"*Will* not! Do you remember *nothing?* Is all that I have done for you to go for nothing?"

"What *you* have done for *me!*" she repeats slowly, and with bitter scorn, her "manners" utterly overlooked in the mad excitement into which Guy's words have lashed her. "And pray what *have* you done? Say—I require an answer!" And the large passionate eyes, instead of wincing, flash fire across Guy's wrathful, wondering stare.

"Well, if you want to know," he answers, coarsely, "I did my best, by marriage, to make a lady of you. For ill-temper and innate vulgarity of course *I* can't be answerable; and now, as you are not exactly what's called

'pleasant company,' I shall leave you to your own reflections. I haven't the least doubt you'll buckle to; and so *ta ta*."

But if Guy Temple fancied that the "play" was over, he found himself unpleasantly mistaken, for the curtain drew up for another act, and he was forced to sit it out.

His last unpardonable rudeness touched Lizzie on her tenderest point, and sent her blood up quite to fever heat.

"Will you please tell me," she says, with outward calm, "whether what I've heard is true—namely, that by marriage a man lifts a woman to *his* rank in life?"

"Quite true," he sneers. "Unless the lady is of Royal Blood; and that, I think, is not *exactly* a case in point."

"Quite true," she says, her bosom heaving, and her proud lips white with passion. "I am as much a princess as you are a gentleman. More need not be said."

And having so spoken, she is passing him, with head erect, towards the door, when Guy grasps her by the arm, and holds it as tightly as though his fingers were a "vice."

"What the —— do you mean?" he says, in a hoarse whisper, for instinct, despite his violent agitation, warns him to hide his disgraceful secret still. "Do you know the meaning of what you've dared to say?"

"Quite well. Only it is painful to explain it. But," lowering her voice, whilst in a somewhat absurd way of putting the matter, the terrible truth breaks from her lips, "a *gentleman* would have told his College when he became a married man; and a gentleman who did not do so would be——"

"Stop, for God's sake, Lizzie!" exclaims the miserable man. "It was horrible weakness—wickedness—what you will. But I did it for love of you! Won't you do your best to save me?"

The sight of his distress moves Lizzie to compassion, though it utterly fails to touch her heart. She promises to do her best, for the sake of the child unborn (*that* secret is revealed quite abruptly to Guy, and, in his dire distress, is hardly noticed by him), to guard the wretched mystery from the world; but the curl of contempt for the man who thinks only of himself has not yet left the beautiful lip, when Guy, slinking from Well Street like a beaten hound, goes in quest of the best dinner that credit can procure for him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE days—a circumstance not so unusual as to require any especial mention of the fact—sped on, and the one drew near to which Lizzie looked forward with a feverish eagerness in which the element of fear formed a component part.

"Lovely weather, though there *is* no sun," was Charley's first remark, as he and Lizzie (how little he guessed the pace at which her heart was galloping) dashed along the Fulham Road in a vehicle the like of which Mrs. Temple had never been seated in before—that is, a gentleman's private cab.

"I am glad the day is dull," Lizzie manages

to say. She is terribly averse—like the foolish child she is—to seeming frightened. "The sunshine makes my dress look so awfully shabby."

"You poor little thing!" he says, looking at the perfect profile (for she dares not meet his gaze), after a fashion which too plainly betrays that he feels his victim is secure. "It is such a frightful idea"—touching the well-bred chestnut with his whip as he spoke—"that you should want any one thing you cannot get. If only I might hope——"

Lizzie interrupted him with a laugh.

"It is a much more frightful idea, *I* think," she says, "that you should be whipping the horse to make him go faster, when *I* want to be out the *whole* day. Please to let him go slow, it is *so* nice to be driven in an easy carriage like this. And it is quite a new pleasure to me. Uncle Beamish—you remember, don't you? that I told you about him, and how good he always was to me? Well, his tax-cart was so

dreadfully rough, I was very nearly jolted out of it sometimes. Afterwards I never forgot to hold by the side. But there is no need to do that here. I don't think I could jump out if I tried."

"Which I hope you have no intention of doing," retorts Charley, with a smile. At which simple remark Lizzie indulges in a little rippling laugh that discloses, through the short black veil she wears, fully enough of small milk-white teeth to set a calmer head than Charley Askew wears upon his shoulders whirling wildly.

There is silence between them for a minute or two, a silence caused by the temporary *embarras* of an over-crowded thoroughfare. Cavalry-soldiers, omnibusses, carriages of all sizes and descriptions, jumbled together with policemen and foot-passengers in an apparently inseparable mass, when lo! in another minute, as though touched by a conjurer's wand, all is smooth, and in good order again, and then—even as other and better men's quadrupeds are doing—

Charley Askew's brilliant chestnut is spanking away again (for our *roué* is too old a hand to waste valuable time by attending to Lizzie's request) towards the bourn to which he is bound.

After casting one or two sidelong glances at the pensive face by his side, it suddenly occurs to Charley to ask his companion what she is thinking of. That *he* is the fortunate subject of her reverie, he entertains no more doubt than he does of the certainty that when Mrs. Temple hears the question, she will return the stereotyped "nothing" for an answer. But, albeit truth is not in such a case to be reasonably expected, the blush and smile will be Nature's own, and with *them* in prospect, he says,

"I am going to be awfully rude, but I *do* want to know so very much what is occupying your mind. Ever since that fourteen-stone policeman seized that small, innocent-looking

boy by the collar, you've been in a regular brown study; and I don't think it fair—upon my soul I don't!" and Charley, trying hard to look plaintive, lays his hand on the small fingers—encased, alas! in a silk glove, for Lizzie can afford no other—that rested on the "apron" of the cabriolet.

The girl is so little versed in the arts of coquetry and deception, that she answers truthfully and at once—

"I was thinking about my own people," she says—"my *father's* relations, I mean—and wondering whether they will ever know anything about me, or whether I exist, even. They are rather what Mrs. Payne calls 'high up people,' I believe," she adds, with one of her sudden and most vivid blushes, for her inherent good taste revolts against the seeming boast. "Sir Henry Fairholme is a sort of relation—at least, my poor father was his first cousin, I——"

"Indeed!—how curious! Sir Henry has a

son—and a very nice young fellow he is, too—in my battalion."

"Really! But," she asks, suspiciously, "why is it 'curious' that these Fairholmes should be *my* relations? My husband has a brother in the Guards, and I see no reason why *I* should not have a cousin *there* too. It seems to me as natural as possible."

"Of course it does," Charley, who does not quite like the tone that the dialogue is taking, hastens to respond. "I don't know why I said it was 'curious.' If you had told me you were first cousin to a Duke, I should have thought it the most natural thing in life—for what Duchess ever was more fair, or looked to the finger-tips more thorough-bred?"

"Even in silk gloves!" laughs Lizzie; and then, before the lovely colour which mingled shame and pleasure had called to her cheek has had time to fade away, the low-voiced talk between the two is, under Askew's practical

guidance, turned to things far more interesting—to one, at least—than discourse upon relationships, and pretty compliments, which so often, like Goldsmith's well-known "passages," lead to nothing.

It would serve no purpose, and might whet the swords of moralists against the humble weapon of my pen, were I to put on paper all that was said and done that day by those two erring mortals. Charley—*en homme bien appris*—was much too wise to "press the pace," and Lizzie, resolutely shutting out all thoughts about the morrow, enjoyed the present after a strangely feverish fashion, which was, I fear (the truth *will* out), not a little perilous to virtue.

Yet in that virtue, as it *stood*, there must have been something Una-like, for neither during the simple dinner, eaten at a small wayside inn, nor during the delicious glide, "each moment worth a world," upon the moonlit

river, did Charley Askew, though

> "There was quick and subtle poison in his veins,
> And madness burning in his heart and brain,"

so conduct himself as, by one rash word or action, to run the chance of losing all.

Nevertheless, such contagion is there in touch, and so powerful an agent is the thing which by learned doctors goes by the name of "sympathy," that during those few bewildering hours, such wild work was wrought in Lizzie's passionate heart that at the last moment, when (previous to leaving Charley's "carriage" for the humbler vehicle which would crawlingly bear her to Well Street) he, with his arm thrown round her, the *one* fervent kiss which he had pressed upon her lips still burning fiercely there, urged her to promise him another and a speedy meeting, she could no more have said him "nay" than she could have stopped the dark cloud sailing across the radiant moon.

Truly Lizzie was "mad" that night. Whe-

ther recovered sanity will come "in time" to save her, it remains for the sequel of this story to disclose.

CHAPTER IX.

IT is one of the privileges of the nobler sex to *complain*, where it is the *specialité* of the weaker to *endure*. When the former—in cases where the latter have been mute—are convicted of unmitigated grumbling, it is not often that they have the grace to give credit where credit is due; but methinks, had Sir Miles Grafton been aware how much solid reason Laura Temple could have brought forward to demonstrate that to *her*, Mr. Hartwell Davison was especially detestable, his (the Baronet's) wrong (for he did very greatly dislike breaking bread with the offender) would have seemed as nothing in comparison.

The facts of the matter were simply these:—

About three months before the return of the Conrad Temples to England, Hart Davison, whose pecuniary affairs were never in a very flourishing condition, had, in piteous terms, and throwing himself humbly on Mrs. Temple's mercy, entreated from her the loan of one hundred pounds. *Only* one hundred pounds, he wrote, to save him from absolute ruin. He would give her his note of hand, and would be able, he hoped, in a very short time, to return the money.

"You will never," he wrote, "regret this act of generosity, nor the kindness of having saved my poor uncle, who is out of health, the knowledge that, after promising him that I would never *play* again, I had incurred a gambling debt to the amount of the one hundred pounds, the loan of which I crave. Should your great goodness of heart induce you to grant my request, and equally should you refuse to do so,

I pray and entreat of you not to mention the subject to Colonel Temple. In this, whether I be doomed to disappointment or not, I trust wholly to your *honour*."

This was the sum and substance of Mr. Hart Davison's *letter;* but the postscript contained words which (added as they were by the writer after mature thought and deliberation) were intended by him to not a little disturb Laura's peace of mind.

"On second thoughts," so ran this afterpiece to the play of words, "I have thought it better first to be quite open with you on a subject which I, till a few days ago, had half determined to keep for ever secret in my own breast; and, secondly, a decision which, as you will perceive is consequent on the last, I have deemed it prudent to take the necessary measures for your receiving this letter otherwise than in the presence of your husband. When I assure you, on the faith and honour of a gentleman, that I

believe myself to be on the track of a mystery, which—if care be not taken—may have the power to blast the happiness of your life, you will, I hope, see the advisability of attending to my advice. Were the person I am writing to possessed of a less noble nature than the one she owns, I might fear that a possibly evil construction might be put upon this postscript. But consciousness of rectitude of purpose is a man's best preservative against alarms such as this. A friend of such old standing as my uncle, is one whom I feel persuaded you would not willingly give pain to. I am in Paris for a few days, *incog.*, and will leave this note at your hotel. My direction in London is at my uncle's house."

This letter, which was signed with the initials, H. D., both surprised and annoyed Laura—annoyed, without in the slightest degree alarming her; nor was she by its perusal in any way moved (as would probably have been the

first thought of a less independent-minded young woman) to go straight to her husband, in hopes of discovering through his aid a solution of the riddle.

Laura Temple had a fancy—one which, Conrad being of a naturally somewhat indolent turn of mind, was not likely to be thwarted—the fancy, that is to say, of struggling, by the aid of her own unassisted energies, through any difficulties which might cross her path. Not, it must be owned, that she perceived the possibility of any very insurmountable impediments to her happiness being either known to or suspected by the man who, having watched Colonel Temple out of the hotel, had left his letter (together with a five-franc piece) with a waiter for "Madame." The said waiter, after pocketing his fee, and promising to give the missive without delay into the lady's own hand, departed to do his employer's bidding, and Laura, on whom the half-curious and wholly

impertinent smile clearly visible on "François'" *galliard* face was completely thrown away, was left to read, mark, and digest as best she could, the contents of Hartwell Davison's suggestive epistle.

Being a woman strong of nerve, and possessed of perhaps too much moral courage to have under any circumstances played well the part of a subserviently dutiful and obedient wife, Laura Temple read the letter twice through attentively, before even the glimmering of an idea that it *might* be advisable to consult Conrad on the matter flashed across her mind. And when it did, she at once put an extinguisher on the notion. It would be too absurd, she told herself, to bother Con about such "nonsensical rubbish." The man wanted money; and—not for his own sake, but because Mr. Davison was an old friend, and had incurred much trouble on her account—he should have it; but this once *only*—not again.

Laura to that effect made a promise to herself; indeed she said as much in her answer, which, whilst it contained rather less of courtesy than Mr. Hart Davison conceived he had a right to expect, was nevertheless so worded as not to wound any feelings of delicacy which might possibly be lingering in his breast.

"I don't suppose he will ever pay it back," Lolo—as she sealed her letter—said carelessly to herself. "I am sure he is an awful scamp; and as to his stupid mystery—— Pshaw! he must think me a fool to be taken in by such nonsense for a moment!"

One of the first visitors at the hotel in which the Conrad Temples, and also (as I may as well mention) Reginald, with the faithful Dixon in close attendance, had taken up their temporary quarters, was Mr. Hartwell Davison —Hart Davison, in somewhat of a new character, with far less pretension in manner, and with a sobriety, nay, almost a shabbiness of

dress which touched Laura—seeing that he was her debtor—with a generous pity. They were not alone (at which circumstance Laura rejoiced), for Guy Temple, looking deplorably out of spirits, had, with brotherly freedom, walked, a few minutes before the announcement of Mr. Davison's visit, into the sitting-room, where Laura, bright, as usnal, of aspect, and with her rich, fashionably-made dress and costly ornaments—making in Guy's mind a striking contrast with the appearance of his own far more lovely wife—received him with kind smiles of welcome.

His moral system was so overcharged with querulousness and mental bile, that he commenced pouring forth his budget of discontent at once.

Miss Bainbridge was growing positively childish, he asserted. Her health was worse certainly—impossible to attribute *all* her many ailments to imagination *now;* but the bothering

part of it was, that she had taken such a wonderful fancy to her companion—that horrible Miss Haggerstone. Guy knew well how it would be—he had said so all along, when that odious companion was first talked about. And this one was a clever woman—there could be no doubt about *that*—and *awfully* cunning. Besides, as Guy ingenuously asked, what *can* you do against a woman who is always on the spot?

Laura was saved the trouble of attempting to answer this naïve question by the entrance of Hart, whose changed demeanour (to which I before alluded) had the effect of inducing his hostess to invite him to dinner on the following day. Guy was engaged, he said—a refusal which did not greatly grieve his sister-in-law; and on Conrad's soon after making his appearance on the scene, with the information (Con was not a ceremonious person) that his wife's carriage was at the door, the quartette naturally broke up.

The little party had been then about eight and forty hours in London, and during that time they (Conrad and his wife) had seen so little of Reginald, that Laura had openly expressed her wonder what he could be about; whilst Colonel Temple, who had, as we know, serious reasons of his own for anxiety concerning his blind brother, had hitherto sought in vain for a fitting opportunity to hold private converse with "Redge."

CHAPTER X.

AFTER all, the Fates so willed it that Sir Miles did not form one of the guests of Laura's little dinner-party. A telegram, sent by the medical man under whose charge his unhappy wife was placed, arrived in London, to inform Sir Miles Grafton that a change in Lady Grafton's conditon had taken place, and that his (her husband's) immediate presence at Fulford House was desirable.

Sir Miles, kind-hearted and excellent man though he was, would never have less desired to possess a window in his breast than on the receipt of this missive. I have already—as the reader may possibly recollect—described him as

"a creature of habit," one of those quiet, middle-aged men (and there are not a few such in this artificial world of ours) who feel any interruption, be it ever so slight, in the routine of their daily lives, after a fashion which, to persons of less methodical stamp of character, would appear almost incomprehensible. Even the death or absence of those they love is mourned by men of this description, more because the "vacant chair" disturbs and irritates—from its strangeness—their nerves, than from any other cause; and therefore it was that Sir Miles, who had *at last* grown thoroughly accustomed to his wife's absence, felt shocked at himself for not welcoming with any satisfaction the idea that the change in Lady Grafton's state *might* be for the better.

On the whole, Laura did not much regret the absence of her guest. Well aware how totally unsuited, even as the chance companions of an hour, were Sir Miles and the banker's so-called

nephew, it was with some little relief of mind that, on Conrad's return from his club, half an hour before the dinner-gong sounded, she tapped at his dressing-room door, and told him what had occurred.

"I am not very sorry," she said. "Sir Miles hated meeting Mr. Davison; and, besides, there *may* be good news awaiting him about poor dear Lady Grafton."

"The only really good news that can possibly be heard about a mad person is that he or she is dead," Conrad, as he finishes the tying of his cravat, responds.

He has not the slightest notion that he has said anything startling, so that Lolo's "Oh! Con, how can you say such horrible things?" takes him rather by surprise.

He proves himself, however, fully equal to the occasion, and is both ready and willing (far more so, indeed, than is usually the case with him) to take his own part against his wife.

"Well, it may be horrible," he says, "I don't say that it isn't, but it's true, for all that; and you would agree with me, Lo, if you had ever done what I have, and that is, seen the poor thing in the madhouse."

"I am sure it was dreadful," Laura shudderingly rejoins; "and I couldn't bear *then* to be told about it, but I don't seem to mind so much now that the telegram says she is different from what she was. I suppose that there was not the least glimmer of recollection in her mind, poor darling, when you saw her?"

"Impossible to say. It was such a strange, fixed stare! I couldn't get it out of my head for weeks."

"It was so good of you to go," Lolo says, admiringly. She believes entirely in Conrad's kindness of heart, and by that faith has worked the miracle of causing her husband not only to perceive his own shortcomings, but to strive, after a mild, lazy fashion, at an improvement in his ways.

"Wonderfully good, wasn't it?" he says, with the slightly conscious look which steals over his handsome face when Laura, self-sacrificing, cheery Laura (who is firmly convinced that he is worth a dozen of her) bestows upon him praise which he knows to be thoroughly undeserved. "Such a lot of trouble to spend an hour or so, at poor old Grafton's request, in trying to make sure that his poor mad wife is as comfortable as circumstances admit of. You see, it is worse than useless *his* seeing her. The very sight of him makes her fly out in the most awful way, and use such language!—whereas at other times the matron, or whatever they call her, told me that she seemed quite contented nursing a big wax doll, which she dresses and undresses as if it were the baby that she thinks it is."

"Poor soul! Do you know, Con, I almost think you're right. If Lady Grafton were to recover, she would know that she never had a child; whereas now——"

"She is quite contented with one that neither eats nor screams, and that doesn't require a lot of money to be spent on it. Consider, too, how trying—if she were to be pronounced cured—for poor Grafton's nerves to be always expecting afterwards that something might happen. He would never get accustomed to *that* state of things; and then what a miserable man he would be! But now, cut away, there's a good girl, and bring Redge here for a moment. I heard his voice just now when the drawing-room door opened. There's something I want to talk to him about; and I must either manage it now or after dinner."

And having so said, Colonel Temple, a man whom nobody that knew him had ever credited with either very sensitive feelings or with any of the "amiable weaknesses" which are apt, on occasion, to inconvenience their owners, felt his heart beat a trifle quicker as Regy's slow step and tapping stick made themselves heard in the passage outside.

For now had come the moment (and ah! how far was Reginald from anticipating the trial which awaited him) when Con had decided to "throw out a feeler" on the subject of the lovely, imprudent "Lily of the Lees."

CHAPTER XI.

"WELL, Regy, old man," begins Con, "what have *you* been doing with yourself all day? You were off so early somewhere, that you didn't give us a chance of finding out whether you cared to go with us to The Firs or not. Lolo—so like her, isn't it?—she has always got some queer dodge or other—doesn't want you to go again till she has got flowers there. She has noticed, she says, that you have a way of connecting places with perfumes, and so there is to be a huge bed of heliotropes, and lots of clove carnations—some of your favourites, eh?—before your next visit to our new home. Laura will prose to you enough about it; at

present I never saw any one more in love with a place."

"I am glad of that. Laura thinks so much of making other people happy that it's only just she should be sometimes pleased herself. Do you know, Con," Regy, after a few moment's pause, adds, "I think you are one of the most fortunate of human beings——"

"And yet how horribly afraid you were, Redge, when I told you of my pet speculation, that I should go best 'railroad pace to the bad.'"

"I remember; but I was morbid that day, and miserable. I had heard something that gave me exceeding pain, and so I could think of nothing better than boring you with my younger brother's advice."

"And that *something*," Conrad, eagerly seizing on the "opening," asks, "is it a trouble that has lasted?—or was it only an annoyance of the moment which is quite over and done

with? Regy, dear old fellow, forgive my asking you—I am not quite the thoughtless, selfish, chaffing brute that I used to be, so do, like a dear, good boy, tell me, is your worry connected in any way with a woman?"

Even before Conrad had finished speaking, Reginald had turned very pale; so white, indeed, was his face that the elder brother, in much alarm, was about to lay his hand on the bell, when the voice of the younger, low and feeble, but quite distinct in its slow, measured tones, stayed his hand.

"A strange question, Conrad, to ask of me; and will you tell me, before I answer it, what put into your head a notion so at variance with probability? What can women be to me, or I to them? They love to read in a man's eyes that he admires and worships them, whilst I—ah, me! *I* cannot even see that they are fair!"

Certainly "sentiment" was not Conrad Temple's *forte*, nevertheless, Regy's simple words so

touched his brotherly feelings that his usually cheery voice was almost unsteady as, laying his hand kindly on the lad's shoulder, he said—

"My poor old boy, that's true; but there's always a bright side, you know, to everything, and you should try not to see only the dark. Besides, you can *remember* what a pretty face is like—Lizzie Fairholme's, for instance. Now, Regy, don't, for God's sake, run away with the notion that I'm inquisitive about what you do, or anything of that sort. Sir Miles saw you once walking—that's the long and the short of the matter—with Lizzie Fairholme. Now, if I'd seen you looking jollier lately, and that kind of thing, I wouldn't have said a word about it; but as you haven't, and, on the contrary, have seemed all nohow (you mustn't mind what I say—you know I'm not much of a hand at palaver), I thought I'd better ask you if you were in any sort of a hobble (you know you needn't say a single word, if you

don't want to), and whether, if so, I could do anything to help you."

At that moment something, to the relief, it may be, of both colloquists—a servant came to inform Colonel Temple that "dinner" was "served."

"Come along, old man. Don't let this nonsense spoil your appetite," Conrad, as he draws his blind brother's arm within his own, says lightly; but Regy's tone is anything but responsive, as, moving slowly along the short passage which leads to the dining-room, he whispers—

"Oh! Con, it's no nonsense—I wish it were; and if the secret were only mine, it shouldn't be one from you a moment longer. But I will try to-morrow to persuade——"

"Hush! Laura knows nothing; we will talk of this later," Conrad says hastily; for they are now almost within earshot of Lolo and Hart Davison, who, arm-in-arm, *en route*—the former having become somewhat impatient of

her guest's platitudes—for the dining-room.

There is no occasion to describe the meal. Of the four who composed the party, there was not one who had not (a remark that might often be made on so-called festive occasions), more or less, something unpleasant to reflect upon. Conrad could think of but little to say, but made the most he could out of there being too much pepper in the soup, and not sufficient flavour of the sea in the fish; whilst Laura, after contributing her quota of conversation by a decidedly novel remark on the few carriages which were to be met with in the street, subsided into a wondering reverie concerning what could possibly be the cause of Conrad's taciturnity and absence of mind. Thus, seeing that (as Hart Davison afterwards shrewdly remarked to a friend) "you couldn't expect a blind man to talk," the task of amusing the company naturally fell, if Mr. Davison could be believed, upon *him*.

Glad enough was Laura when, the tedious repast being over, she could beat a retreat into the "sitting"-room, and there, whilst still speculating on the possible reasons for Con's abstraction, could indulge in the hope that Hart, who *must*, or, at any rate, *ought*, to have felt he was *de trop*, would not again that evening venture to put in an appearance in her drawing-room.

But in this matter she was doomed to suffer disappointment, a disappointment that was rendered still more difficult to bear cheerfully by the circumstance of Mr. Hartwell's coming into her presence ("joining the lady," as he gracefully termed it) alone.

"Your husband," began this free-and-easy personage, rendered free-and-easy partly by the mixture of wines—for he had not drunk to excess—wihch he had been pouring down his throat, and partly by a certain "pull," to borrow his own elegant expression, which he either had, or imagined himself to have, over Mrs. Conrad

Temple. "Your husband has taken himself off somewhere with his brother. Poor young chap! He looks uncommon seedy. Not half the man he was at your wedding. He is in bad health always, isn't he?"

"My brother-in-law is not strong," Laura answers, stiffly. "And lately we certainly have thought him looking rather less well than usual. Perhaps the heat of the weather has weakened him."

"Possibly. It has certainly been unpleasantly warm this last month or so, and if he don't perspire, why, it's very likely to affect him. I find it suits me to a turn. The only objection is, it ruins you in gloves, if you happen to have a moist hand."

To this agreeably suggestive remark Mrs. Temple does not condescend to reply; and her companion, determined, perhaps, that she shall be compelled to pay him some sort of attention, hits upon another topic, one which, if not

precisely what may be called pleasant, has certainly the effect desired.

"I shall see my uncle early to-morrow," he says, "and shall be happy to take any message to him which you would like to send. Poor old boy! He's quite tied by the legs, and uncommon blue about himself! There are not many people that he cares to see, and you happen to be one of 'em. When he heard that I was coming to dine here—'You may tell Mrs. Temple,' says he, 'that I hope she'll come and see me before I die.'"

"Did he really say that? I am so sorry! I had not the least idea he was so ill!"

"Oh! half of it's fancy, I believe; at least, the doctor says so. And a good deal of what's the matter with him comes, in my private opinion, from money-worries. You may remember," he went on, in a lower tone, and edging his chair nearer to Laura's sofa, "my writing to you confidentially about——"

"Oh! yes—in Paris," impatiently. "But, Mr. Davison, I really, if you please, would rather not hear another word about that occurrence. You are most welcome to the money, but I have such an intense dislike to keeping anything a secret from Colonel Temple that the very memory of having once done so puts me out of sorts" (this with one of her radiant smiles, for the idea of Lolo being gloomy and out of temper is amusing, even to herself) "for a week."

"Does it? That's unfortunate! For it *might* be inconvenient to—— I conclude, Mrs. Temple, that you have heard the saying that there are secrets in all families?"

Laura bows her head slightly, in token of assent. She does so wish that the man would cease his platitudes and go, that she can hardly refrain from rudeness, in order to effect the object of her desire.

"Now," continues Hart, who is one of those

oppressive interlocutors who apparently entertain the idea that proximity is either a stimulant to eloquence, or is likely to produce a mesmeric influence over the listener—"Now, when I wrote to you in Paris, my uncle had been suffering a good deal from the same disorder which is attacking him now; and at that time, his nerves being, I suppose, weakened by illness, he allowed me to know more of his private affairs than he had ever done before——"

"But, Mr. Davison," Laura breaks in haughtily, "you cannot suppose that *I* have any wish to——"

"Allow me—one moment. I believe you to be totally ignorant of the extent to which your affairs are mixed up with my uncle's; nor had I, till he at that time rather let the cat out of the bag, the least notion what a bother your business had been to him."

"Mr. Davison!" Laura, in great wrath, exclaims, "you are forgetting yourself strangely.

If your uncle has any complaint to make of the trouble I have given him, let him say so to me with his own lips. I shall see Mr. Davison to-morrow, and then——"

"You will not, I entreat of you, mention this conversation to him. There is a hitch, some way or other, in your concerns, which has had, I feel convinced, the worst possible effect upon his health, and—but hush!—*mum*, as people say, is the word, and one of these days——Ah! Colonel Temple—been having a cigar? I must be thinking of one myself soon. I'm not sure that the last before turning in isn't the best; and I promised my poor uncle not to be late. Mrs. Temple" (with a horribly familiar and confidential wink, as he shook hands with his hostess,) "I'm afraid I've been keeping you up. You'd have been in the land of Nod, I daresay, long ago, if I hadn't been trying to make myself agreeable."

"What an unmitigated brute!" was Con's

short but decisive commentary on his departed guest; and then, before he and Laura betook themselves to rest, the latter had learned from her husband as much as he could tell her of the mystery which had, since the departure of Mr. Davison from the dinner-table been partially cleared up by Reginald.

"I said nothing to you before," he rather deprecatingly wound up his discourse by saying, "because I did not feel quite sure—God forgive me for my stupid doubts!—that dear old Redge would come thoroughly well out of the business. And yet, absurd as it may sound, I was so utterly ashamed of myself that, do you know, I got hot from head to foot when I began talking to him about it. It served me right for thinking for a second that Regy, who is far and away nearer Heaven than, I fear, I can ever be, *could* have done anything underhand or unprincipled."

Con's *accès* either of self-abnegation or senti-

ment were, as is usual with his sex, rare; and when such instances of weakness did chance to vary his discourse, his wife possessed far too much tact and knowledge of human nature to take any admiring or other notice of the anomaly. In the depths of her true wife's heart, she firmly believed that in so far as "honour" and "principle went, Con had fully as good a chance of finding a place ("might it be very long first!" Lolo devoutly prayed) in Heaven as his less-tempted-to-sin brother, but, compliments being just then worse than out of place, she contented herself with merely saying, in response to Conrad's last remark, "I hope he will get the poor girl's consent to speak;" and then, stirred by one of those inspirations by which women so far oftener than men are visited, she added a little timidly, having the fear of Con's ridicule before her eyes, "What do *you* think? Is it not just possible that Guy may be in some sort mixed up with the story?"

Conrad received the idea with a shout of scornful laughter. That Guy, the reticent, the cold-blooded, the "good boy of the family," should be concerned in a love affair, or be, in any sort or fashion, in what is called a "scrape," was, in Colonel Temple's view of things, simply ridiculous.

"How such a notion could enter your head puzzles me!" was a remark which he made more than once before sleep overtook him; but his last words to Laura were, "Well, I *am* glad it's off my mind. I'll never have another secret from you, old woman, if I know it."

That same "old woman" found slumber longer in creeping to her eyes than he had done, for *her* secret had not been divulged, her earnest vow, not to "keep" anything "from him" again, had been registered aloud. To be sure there *might* not—and such probably would turn out to be the case—be anything more than what Con was in the habit of calling *bosh* in what

Hart Davison had said and written; nevertheless, during the space of an hour or so, which hour seemed infinitely longer than sixty minutes to usually sound-sleeping Lolo, she contrived to worry herself not a little concerning the one only subject which, between herself and her husband, was not as open as the day. She contrived, however, at last to turn the current of her thoughts towards the delights of furnishing, and the endless pleasures to be afforded by stove-houses and conservatories. These agreeable fancies soon lulled her to sleep, and when morning broke she found that the "heaviness of the night" had vanished with its "watches."

CHAPTER XII.

A HOT, oppressive August day—not a breath of wind stirring in the dust-laden streets—a shabby, poorly-furnished sitting-room on the second story, and in that sitting-room—one which the Reader has glanced into before—there sits, near one of the ill-cleaned windows (which are at a considerable distance from the floor, and consequently contribute less than they might otherwise do to the cheerfulness of the room) the poor young lodger, whom Mrs. Payne, chiefly for the reason that "them Fletchers" seem to have hardly enough to "pay their way," is beginning to speak anything but charitably of.

To her friend, the cheesemonger's wife, who lives round the corner, and whose two daughters, having been brought up above their station, have fallen immeasurably below it, Mrs. Payne, aware that to "Betsy Goodwyn" the fell suspicions which she had to communicate would be as "nuts," was very loquacious on the subject of her lodger.

"You see, I never felt quite sure of 'em from the first," she, whilst sipping a cheering cup of tea, remarked; "and if it hadn't been for Payne—but men are such fools about a pretty face——"

"And this Mrs. Fletcher's got *that* of her own, I suppose? I've never had a good look at her yet. But, I say, Tilda," continued Mrs. Goodwyn, who was very stout and dark of complexion, with a hard, cruel look about her mouth, which, however, had never, previous to the "falls" which I have just alluded to, been observable there—"But, Tilda, what makes

you think as there's anything wrong—about *her*, I mean. Do you suppose that Mr. Fletcher, as he calls himself, ain't her 'usband?"

"Oh! law, no. He's *that*, sure enough. Why, you may hear him rate at her sometimes, as Payne shouldn't rate at me, *I* could tell him. And it ain't 'im as gives her flowers—Such beauties! Guinea bokeys, I'll be bound, some of 'em, if they're a shilling's worth."

"She don't stop out o' nights, does she?" asked Mrs. Goodwyn, whose memory probably took her back to the dismal days when "Emma," a shop "young lady," was reported "missing" in the morning, and, very unfortunately, was not found again for many days.

"No—oh! no, she's never done *that* yet; but she's been out twice as late as ten, and it wasn't with her 'usband, I'll be bound. However, he's no good, to leave her alone so much as he does."

"P'raps he's obleeged to—got a place, maybe,

like Mr. Payne 'as. And a good thing too. I declare I'm tired to death of seeing Goodwyn and his apron about the house. Always poking their noses into everything, men are, if they 'aven't work out of one's way. The less one sees of 'em, I say, the better."

It was, alas! all too true! Lizzie had so far yielded to temptation, that since that first perilous step (the one we wot of, during which she had made that most fatal of all discoveries, that she loved the man of whom, save as an *indifferent* friend, it was a sin for her to think) she had not courageously shunned her lover. At first she felt terribly ashamed, and with a great sinking of heart she asked herself whether it were possible that Colonel Askew could suspect her of such wickedness—such want of wifely honour. That he, after a certain fashion, loved her, or perhaps *thought* he did, Lizzie felt, I am afraid, much pleasure in

believing; but that he meant her ill, or *could* like her better for being, in thought, "dishonourable," "vile," and "forward," *that* anomaly the Lily of the Lees had not, as yet, in her breast and brain the power to credit.

Those who can in any degree understand and appreciate the state of mind into which this stranger to the ways of wickedness had wrought herself, will not find much difficulty in believing that the fear of betraying her own weakness had more power to persuade her from rushing again into temptation than had any indistinct fears of dangers likely to accrue to her from her tempter's o'ermastering passions. But, as we have—from Mrs. Payne's statement—seen, neither motive was sufficient to deter Lizzie from another and yet another step down the slippery, downward path. In her absolute dread of losing him, a dread born of the bitter isolation of her heart, Charley found an ever-powerful means for the attainment of his end. And that end, what was

it? It was simply—as Colonel Askew, even while "his blood was up in riot on his brow," would swear—to enjoy a few more hours of her "most sweet society"—away—ah! *that*, as Lizzie told herself, was the tempting bait to her—from the sights and sounds of noisy, uncongenial London, and amongst the trees, and flowers, and fresh air she loved. And so, shutting her eyes (not without wilfulness, I fear) to the danger she was braving, Lizzie allowed herself once again the perilous delight of forgetting, during the brief space of one delicious Summer afternoon and evening, all save Charley Askew, and the love which every moment spent in his society but intensified and deepened.

It may be urged, as some excuse for this poor young woman's weak and almost wicked conduct, that her home—if home it could be called—had become more desolate and less endurable than ever. After the brief burst of something that looked like penitence, but which *was* simply

shame at being detected, was over, Guy grew, during his rare visits to his neglected wife, more cross and disagreeable, than ever. He made no further allusions to the plan of her return, as Lizzie Fairholme, to her uncle's house, but the mere sight of the one human being who was cognizant of his shame grew to be hateful to him; nor did the daily increasing influence, in the dull old Gloucester Place house, of wily Miss Haggerstone, tend to improve his temper. Money troubles, too—those most frequent of all evils to which flesh is heir—continued to harass and annoy him. He had contrived for awhile, by the aid of his good-natured friend, the wealthy solicitor (the eldest of whose over-indulged daughters had taken a fancy to Guy's blond, handsome face), to stave off the day of reckoning, which had at one time seemed so very near at hand. Mr. Heywood, the height of whose small ambition it was to connect himself with "county families," had, after mature

reflection (for though apparently one of the most jovial and open-of-hand-and-heart mortals that existed, he was not "quite such a fool as he looked"), decided that it would be no bad policy, taking rich Miss Bainbridge's failing health, and her great affection for her godson and cousin (the lawyer had listened with all faith—for he held the honour of "county families" in high esteem—to Mr. Temple's explanation of the matter) into account, to lay the evidently not yet hardened spendthrift under an obligation.

"Pay it when you can, my dear fellow," the well-to-do lawyer, who had been the founder of his own fortunes, said; adding, in his frank, genial way, "You'll be a rich man some day, I don't doubt, in spite of those confounded old laws of entail; but if you're not—well, what's the use of having a few hundreds lying idle, if you can't give them to a friend when he requires it? And now, off with you, my dear

boy, for I've five thousand things to think about and do; and besides, those girls of mine won't thank me for keeping you jawing here, when they are dying for their pic-nic. Four o'clock, wasn't it"—taking out his watch—"that you were to be in Sussex Gardens?—and, by Jove! it only wants a quarter now!"

So the busy lawyer returned to his business-chair, whilst the "dear boy," with a breast but little lightened of its normal burden, wended his way to where Leo and Jessie Heywood—their only "chaperon" (a nominal one, as may be supposed) being a light-hearted brother of fifteen—were waiting, with no little impatence, for the only laggard (for, sooth to say, men were generally up to time when they were under the fair Jessie's orders) of their agreeably unceremonious little party.

It was through no deep-laid scheme of Guy's that he was thus received *en famille* under the lawyer's roof. Accident at first, and then good

cheer and liveliness on the girls' part, did the rest. The young ladies were known to be heiresses on a not quite despicable scale. Their mother—a good, long-ailing woman, doomed to die ere long of some mysterious "inward" complaint—had brought Mr. Heywood a fortune of £40,000, which money was, on her marriage, so settled that on their respective wedding-days the sum of twenty thousand pounds would devolve upon each of the wealthy solicitor's daughters. Guy Temple did not, you may be sure, forget, whilst talking in Gloucester Place over his new friends, to make the most of their pecuniary advantages; and Miss Bainbridge, whose love of gold seemed to grow in strength as the time for bidding her god farewell for ever drew nearer, was well satisfied to believe what was, in fact, very much the case, namely, that almost all Guy's spare time was passed in the companionship of his new and wealthy friends.

But whilst Lizzie's unworthy husband was thus, without much thought of or care for future consequences, endeavouring, in the laughter-loving society of Sunnyside, to forget his needs, his dishonour, and his sin, there was *one*, and that one a woman, who, with wits sharpened by self-interest and greed of gain, set herself the, to her, not uncongenial task of watching, with a view of injuring him in the opinion of his patroness, the movements of Mr. Guy Temple. The name of this spy—as yet little known to the reader—was Haggerstone, and she possessed, as a first foundation on which to build, this much of fact—that late, by lamplight, one warm July evening, she had seen Mr. Temple walking arm-in-arm with a very pretty and thoroughly respectably-dressed young woman. To follow the pair at a safe distance, and ascertain, if possible, the house to which they were bound, was the thought that flashed in a second—for Miss

Julia Haggerstone was London born and bred —through the brain of that astute and experienced person. During the comparatively short time that she had been domiciled in the gloomy Gloucester Place house, the "companion" had contrived to obtain a surprising amount of influence over the weakened mind of the money-loving spinster. As Guy Temple had truly said, Miss Haggerstone had, in being "in possession," nine points, at least, in her favour. "A word in season—how good is it" to the one so situated, and how *evil* often for the "absent," who is—according to the Proverb—"always in the wrong." At first it was not more than a slice, and that a small one, of all Miss Bainbridge had to leave, which the schemer was bold enough to covet; but appetite grows from what one gloats on (*vide* the boy who *longs* before the pastrycook's window, or the hungry beggar-man *sniffing* above the area of the Reform Club) as much, if we may believe the

French proverb, as from what one eats; and the daily sight of her employer's valuable possessions—her silver tea-service, and her antique china, her solid mahogany furniture, and all the various signs and symptoms of being able to leave the value of a "pretty penny" behind her—all this hourly gazing upon the good and comfortable things of this world greatly whetted the craving of this lone and ill-off woman of forty-five after possession of the older "old maid's" goods.

It was, as I before said, this craving which caused her to follow on Guy's footsteps, when he, with the girl whom Miss Haggerstone little suspected was his wife upon his arm, had, after a late walk in the Regent's Park, arrived within little more than a stone's throw of Well Street. A less clever and far-seeing woman than Julia Haggerstone—one, too, who more dearly loved talking, for talking's sake—would probably have run the risk of losing the game by playing out

this trump card at once. In the hand of Guy Temple's enemy it was, however, kept safe in the "corner," ready to be brought to light when the time for producing it with effect should arrive. In the meantime, like "the sullen mole that runneth underneath," Miss Haggerstone pursued untiringly her deeply-hidden purpose. By dint of much watching, and of craftily-directed inquiries, she discovered that under the borrowed *alias* of Fletcher, Miss Bainbridge's guilty godson had for some months (with a *soi-disant* Mrs. Fletcher as his companion), been the lodger of "highly respectable" Mrs. Payne, at 13, Well Street. By dint of extreme perseverance, and even going the length of—under the pretence of looking for lodgings—making the acquaintance of the "decent householder" in question, the "enemy" likewise learned something regarding the not very flourishing condition of the garrison.

"I could let you see the second floor rooms,

'm, whether Mrs. Fletcher's in or out," Mrs. Payne had said; and from this speech, together with one or two others of a similar description, Miss Haggerstone, who was not quite ignorant of "Bohemian" life, gathered, that for some cause or other Mr. Guy Temple's finances were at rather a low ebb.

Miss Bainbridge's health had been for some time very rapidly declining. Old age might be classed as her chief ailment, but she had been attacked by others over which two doctors nodded their heads mysteriously; and there was a threatening of paralysis over all. Under these circumstances, it was only natural that those interested in the matter should have their attention a good deal turned towards the probable distribution—after death—of Miss Bainbridge's property; and Julia Haggerstone —the expression of whose countenance, by the way, greatly belied, inasmuch as it was singularly open and honest, her real character—

began to think that the time had nearly arrived for firing the train which she had long since carefully laid.

The inexpediency of even attempting to remove the invalid from town had been, early in Summer, decided on, and Miss Bainbridge, although forced to admit the wisdom of the decree, was rendered terribly peevish thereby. Possessing no longer the power to be amused, she yet hungered after "change," and insisted, poor old soul! on being entertained. To this end she would often desire "Haggie" (her pet name for the very unloveable Julia) to bring out for her inspection all her store (no inconsiderable one) of rich "laces," yellow with age, and bearing about them that especial kind of perfume which belongs to such like long-laid-by articles of priceless female ornamentation. There, in pieces of different lengths, width, and value, wrapped carefully up in tissue paper, lay the hoarded treasures; and as the thin

hands of their owner feebly turned over these precious relics of her bygone days of youth, "Haggie" watched the operation with greedy eyes, saying to herself, "Surely she will give me one piece at least. The old wretch can never mean to send me back with all of it to the place where she hoards her finery."

But, for all her longing, so totally unknown to Miss Bainbridge was the pleasure of giving, that not so much as the value of one humble shilling found its way, in the shape of a present, from the rich woman's possession to that of her patient *souffre-douleur*. But there is, as we all know, such a thing as overloading a willing beast, and Miss Haggerstone, smarting under that terrible wound beneath the collar, namely, a bitter sense of "dependence," determined (the rapid increase of Miss Bainbridge's infirmities playing its due part in the resolve) to lose no time in imparting what she knew of Guy Temple's misconduct to that erring gentleman's

hitherto only vaguely suspicious relation.

Before, however, she could put her project in execution, another fact connected with the delinquent's intrigue was accidentally brought to light; and Miss Haggerstone becoming, by the merest accident, the possessor of this fresh weapon of defence, her hand was greatly strengthened thereby. In what manner the existence of this fact became known to the "companion," and after what fashion she made profit out of the same, will shortly be made known to the reader.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT was late at night, after ten o'clock, as Mrs. Payne had with truth, to her chosen "gossip" said, when Lizzie, after her *last* day's pleasuring, drove *home* in her slow "four-wheeler" to Well Street. It had been indeed a day to remember! Emotion after emotion had come crowding on, till the weak senses reeled beneath the pressure, and only the one small remnant left of reason and of principle prevented the fatal "fall."

We need not dwell upon the hours which, in after-life, Lizzie will look back to with that wondrous admixture of regret and shame that

sometimes haunts the backward thoughts of not a few among us weak, erring mortals. From first to last the trying *strain* continued—there were,

> "Hearts beating—at meeting;
> Tears starting—at parting."

Tears, at least, on the woman's side, for even *then* conscience, in *her* breast, was busily at work, and the still small voice within warned her that in the end, whether she should be strong to resist, or whether, yielding to the tempter, she should do violence to all that was yet pure and right within her, there would be "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

On the slow-going horse dragged her wearily to her home! Over-excited and tired, she leant back in the uneasy vehicle, scarcely noticing the busy crowds which still, late as was the hour, filled the more frequented streets; but at the top of Regent Street there was a "stoppage,"

and Lizzie, raising her eyes to ascertain the cause, read, by the flaring gaslight, the solemn words (they were painted in huge type upon a placard carried on a man's shoulder)—

"Be sure your sin will find you out!"

The effect on the nervous, conscience-stricken girl was little short of electric. For a few moments she seemed as one paralysed, and then the solemn warning—for to her it appeared as though given especially for her deliverance—told with mighty force, and a prayer, one in which thankfulness mingled with earthly moaning, rose from the thoroughly aroused creature's heart to heaven.

On the day following—it chanced to be about a week previous to the time when Miss Haggerstone decided to reveal all she knew of Mr. Temple's shortcomings—Lizzie wrote the note which brought Reginald with all speed to town.

It was wonderful the trust which, in her weak-

ness and her need, she placed in the blind lad, whose own hard battle against thoughts and feelings which he knew were at variance with duty she little dreamt of! Had she done so, it would hardly have been to *his* ear—her brother though he was, and kind, and pure, and gentle —that she would have confided *almost* all her sin, her sorrow, and her frailty; but deeming Regy ignorant alike and innocent of the faults and errors to succumb to which she had been so sorely tempted, Lizzie—

"Feeling her grovelling soul so desolate and dry,"

came to one almost as weak and erring as herself for comfort and for strength.

But *he* had won the victory! and when his forlorn and nearly shipwrecked sister confessed to him (thankful the while that he was blind, and could not read the shame upon her face) how nearly she had fallen, he had strength to whisper, in God's holy name, words of counsel

and of pardon. The rationalists and the wise in their own wisdom will doubtless call him "mad" or an "enthusiast," when I state that he, too, inclined to the belief that the awful Writing in the Street—the writing which had spoken with such power to the soul trembling between right and wrong—was mercifully given in warning, and that, therefore, to neglect that warning would, he told her, be a double sin.

On his own trial, as, with his hand held tightly by the only woman whom on earth he ever either had, or could passionately love, he listened to her sobbed-out confidence, there is no need to dwell. Once more he came out conqueror; but such combats sorely try the weak in health and spirit, such as Regy was, and his frail life—the life his mother garnered far more tenderly than her own—was shortened through that interview by many a day.

"If you think it right, dear Reginald, cer-

tainly it shall be done; and to save you some of those terrible heart-beatings, I will write, in a few lines, the truth. This you can show to your brother; and perhaps, amongst you, you will find some means of saving Guy's lost honour, for that is all I seem to care for now."

It was on the occasion of Reginald's second visit to Well Street, and after he had successfully endeavoured to persuade Lizzie to have (with certain reservations, of course; for not till years have passed over their heads will the young wife have the courage to make an entirely "clean breast of it" to Guy) no secrets from her husband, that the short conversation which gave rise to the above little speech from Lizzie took place.

"And when Guy knows that I have long been cognizant of the whole," Regy said, "he will see the wisdom, as Conrad has heard of our (you and me, Lizzie) having been seen together, of his being taken, real good fellow as he is, into our counsels."

As we have just seen, Reginald (for Lizzie, crushed down in spirit, submitted herself blindly to his will) had it all his own way in the matter. He was feeling very far from well, and a certain breathlessness, mingled with pain, warned him to avoid as much as possible all trying emotion. For Regy, notwithstanding his personal affliction, and often ailing though he was, possessed within himself such a fund of natural cheerfulness—his love for those who loved him was so deep and fervent, that even to live was felt by him to be a boon. By nature the merriest, blithest of God's creatures, endowed with a strong will and ardent passions, perhaps (but who are we, that we should judge?) it needed the restraining power that lay in his great trial to keep him safe, and pure, and upright amidst the thousand temptations of "the world, the flesh, and the devil." Well did he know and feel that probably for him existence, whether long or short, would be,

perforce, deprived of much that makes the lives of other men precious and full of joy; and yet the boy longed to live! Hope is a plant which in young breasts is very hard to kill, and for his mother's sake, as much, perhaps, as for his own, Regy, when forcibly reminded of a malady the serious nature of which he was well aware, did his best to guard the health which was to her, as he truly felt, so inestimably precious.

Reginald Temple may perhaps be blamed in that he urged his brother's wife to act independently of her husband's will and wishes; but it must be borne in mind that the case was an urgent one. Lizzie, penitent and remorseful now, might, if exposed to fresh temptation, fail again; and discoveries might be made which would blast Guy's name for ever. He acted—poor inexperienced lad!—according to his lights; and with Lizzie's note of explanation in his pocket—a note which it was his purpose (feeling the danger to himself, and consequently

to others, of any fresh agitation) to enclose with a letter of explanation to Conrad—he left the crushed and humbled woman to

> "The Merciful Avenger, who,
> Knowing her frailty well, would hold her fast."

At least, so hoped and trusted Regy, as, in accordance with a promise made to his sister-in-law, he called in Gloucester Place to inquire where Mr. Guy Temple was to be found. To his surprise, instead of a reply to his question, the servant returned with a request from Miss Bainbridge that he would walk upstairs. His mistress was not, added the man, well enough to leave her bed, but she hoped Mr. Reginald would excuse ceremony, and come to her room.

The demand was not very pleasing to Regy. He had never felt much either of liking or respect for the old lady who, by singling out Guy as her *protégé*, had done him so little real good service; and besides—albeit I am half

ashamed to confess this weakness on Regy's part —there entered into his distaste a little of that dread of bed-room *stuffiness* which persons of sensitive nerves and delicate health so often have to contend with. He did not, however, for a moment contemplate non-compliance with Miss Bainbridge's invitation, and under the guidance of the portly butler, who took his time whilst going upstairs, found himself in due course by the bedside of the greatly altered woman.

Altered, as even sightless Regy could understand, for her voice was very feeble, and the hand which held his felt like nothing but skin and bone within his grasp. This visit did not last many minutes, yet during its continuance Regy heard more kind words from his old relation than he could previously have believed her capable, during her whole life-time, of having uttered; and as he was taking leave she drew him down towards her, and in a whisper—for "Haggie" was close at hand—said,

"I am going to make my Will to-morrow, and you will find, my dear, that you are not forgotten."

Thoroughly taken aback by this announcement, Reginald was about to remonstrate, when the old lady stopped him summarily:

"I am too ill to be worried and contradicted," she, with a return of her old spirit, said. "There, good-bye, and God bless you! and—remember the old woman in your prayers."

In another moment his place was empty, but on the floor—it had slipped out of his breast coat-pocket—lay Lizzie Temple's letter!

CHAPTER XIV.

ON that very morning (events will crowd on each other sometimes in quite an unconscionable manner) Mr. Davison was seized with an attack of paralysis. The doctors, who were immediately summoned to the bedside of the insensible banker, cautiously pronounced the attack to be not necessarily fatal. Nature might, as she often did, make an effort, and in that case——

"In that case," broke in, without, however, throwing any new light on the matter, the brisker and more youthful of the two practitioners, "we must hope the best."

And the "best," as regarded his or her individual interests, those who were in any way connected with the sick man, did, it is only reasonable to conclude, "hope; and Hartwell, who had his own ideas and purposes regarding the matter to follow up—having ascertained to his perfect satisfaction that the stricken Dives was in a state of complete unconsciousness—proceeded, after getting possession of a certain key, which, as he well knew, opened the bureau where his *uncle's* most secret and important papers were deposited, to search diligently after any documents which were likely to bear upon the subject of Mrs. Conrad Temple's affairs. He had long suspected the existence of some strange mystery connected with the large fortune of which Miss Ripley had so suddenly become possessed. From time to time—especially at the period when, by Laura's refusal of his nephew's "offer," he was angered to the extent of losing, on the moment, due command over his speech,

Mr. Davison had said words regarding "Joe Ripley's" niece which decidedly implied that Colonel Temple's bride was not only not the "catch" she seemed, but that Laura, the heiress to the old miser's thousands, was, to a certain extent, and in some slightly-hinted-at manner, in his (Mr. Davison's) power.

It was on these hints that Hartwell had spoken to Mrs. Temple, and had then and there ascertained that, supposing there to be any hidden mystery connected with that straightforward young person's affairs, *she* at least was ignorant of its existence.

It was with eager haste, and with all the needful preparations—duly at hand—for skilfully opening both wax and gum-fastened envelopes, that Hartwell Davison began his search. Almost the first (for certainly Fortune does seem oft-times to favour the guilty bold) directed packet which his eyes lighted upon, appeared likely to reward him for his trouble, for in Mr. Davison's

handwriting there was inscribed on it, in hastily traced characters:

"Document relating to Mrs. Conrad Temple's affairs."

The envelope was an adhesive one, and the unscrupulous intruder having successfully tampered with that small difficulty, there met his eye an enclosure, carefully sealed, and directed as follows:

"William Greatorex, Esq.,

To be opened after my death."

"Humph!" said Hart to himself. "The old boy's closest friend. Let's *him* into the secret, of course. Only *I*'ll know it first, or I'm a Dutchman."

And having so decided, he, with dexterous fingers, commenced picking off the wax, an operation which took him some little time and trouble; but his reward—when at last the "secret" long suspected came to light—was great indeed.

Great, that is, in so far as, in its utter and never-to-be-guessed-at marvellousness, it far exceeded all that Hartwell had, in his wildest dreams, thought upon as possible.

"By George! this *is* a go!" was his exclamation, as, with the letter which explained all open in his hand, he endeavoured to steady his ideas, and realise in what manner this wonderful discovery might best be turned to his own advantage. His mind was essentially of the busy and the stirring order, and the "dashing game" of life was therefore the one which it best suited him to play. It required but little reflection to enable him to see that the sole persons interested in keeping inviolate the secret which he had just unearthed were Conrad Temple and his wife; and this being so, he, with the cunning of a base, unworthy nature, speedily decided that from the weaker vessel of the two it was his "game" to look for "hush money."

And without loss of time either, he told himself, for the "old boy" *might* rally, the doctors said, at any moment, and he (Hart) could hardly expect that, without being shown the endorsement in Mr. Davison's own handwriting to the truth of his (Hartwell's) statement, Mrs. Temple would implicitly believe the wondrous tale which he had now in his power to tell.

So, armed with the valuable document, he commenced his hasty preparations for the attack. His first move was to the room where the man whom he had long more than suspected to be his father, lay a miserable spectacle, neither alive nor dead—speechless, and with half-closed eyes—upon his pillow.

"Just the same? No change, I suppose?" whispered Hartwell to the hired nurse; and having heard her assenting answer, he went on tip-toe down the stairs, and out of the house.

"To Dover Street—best pace," he said, as he

jumped into a hansom; and then, without loss of time, he began a mental calculation as to how much he could hope to *squeeze*, on this first pressure of his instrument of torture, out of the trembling hands of his victim.

"I hope to G— that *he* won't be at home if *she* is," said this agreeable gentleman to himself, as the hansom, with its lean, well-bred old horse all in a lather, pulled up before Green's Hotel.

Hartwell threw the man half-a-crown, and rushing up the steps, inquired of a waiter, who was airing himself at the door, whether Mrs. Temple was at home.

The man answered in the affirmative, with the additional volunteered information that "the Colonel" had "just stepped out." And then Mr. Hartwell Davison was duly ushered upstairs.

Mrs. Conrad—rather an out-spoken person at all times—did not scruple to let Mr. Davison know that his visit was ill-timed. She was just

going out. Her carriage was at the door. The open one with the grey horses. Had not Mr. Davison noticed it? She was very sorry—had such quantities to do, and if he *could* call another time, &c., &c.

How bright she looked! How handsome even, with her young face radiant with happiness, and with such a halo of wealth and prosperity around her! And he had come to crush all this, to plunge this blithesome creature into the depths of wailing and lamentation; and Hartwell Davison, looking at Laura Temple, in her rich, becoming dress, and wearing that beaming smile, knew that so it was, and felt no more remorse than if he were about to crush a brilliant butterfly beneath his heel.

"I am sorry," he begins, laying his hat on the table, and standing, as she also is, near the empty fire-place, "very sorry to be in the way, but if you will grant me five minutes, I will try to make it no more."

"Thanks! Don't be long, please. I hope your uncle is no worse?"

"Indeed, he is—much worse. He was seized with paralysis this morning, and is not expected to recover."

"Poor man! How sorry I am! And I had intended going this afternoon to see him! How grieved I am that I put off doing it so long."

Hartwell has changed his position since she began to speak, and is now, with his hands on the back rail of a chair over which he is stooping, looking, with the triumphant insolence of a man who is about to taste his revenge, into her face.

"I don't suppose you'll ever care to see much of him again, whether he lives or not," he says, coarsely. "But that all depends on how you take things. You've sucked a pretty good share of the profits, and had your luck out of the plant besides, so that——"

Laura draws a step or two nearer to the bell.

She thinks that the man must be either mad or drunk, and prudence is, she feels, the better part of valour.

"Mr. Davison," she says, her heart beating alike with fear and anger, but nevertheless striving her best to wear a bold front before the enemy, "this is not the first time that you have forgotten yourself in my presence. Let it be the last, or I must request Colonel Temple to put an end to your visits here."

Hart, at this threat, laughs loud aud rudely.

"I think I see you, my fine lady, saying a a word to that grand Colonel of yours about *this* visit, at all events. Now, don't fly out. You'd better listen quietly, and you'll own *that* yourself by-and-by. The fact is, I have discovered *everything.* You know I told you long ago there was a screw loose, and that screw is, that you have not really a shilling in the world —that your uncle, old Joe Ripley, might have died in a ditch, if it had not been for my uncle's charity, and that you——"

"Stop!" she exclaims, and advancing, her head thrown back, and her whole air breathing command, to within a few paces of where he has planted himself, she adds—"I will not hear another word, excepting in the presence of my husband. I do not believe one syllable that you have uttered, but——"

He draws the banker's letter to Mr. Greatorex from his pocket, and places it in her hand.

"Read that," he says abruptly. "You recognise the writing, I presume, and I more than half suspect that, having read it, you will see fit to change your note."

CHAPTER XV.

THEY are together in Reginald's room, the two brothers, who have done nothing to be ashamed of, talking, with troubled, anxious hearts, over the great sin of the one who *has*.

"By Jove!" exclaims (and that, as the reader will easily credit, not for the first time since the conversation began) astonished and half-bewildered Conrad, "it's by far and away the most extraordinary and disgusting thing *I* ever heard of! He never can show his face again, that's certain. And such a disgrace to have brought upon us all! I declare I almost feel as if I could never bear to speak to him again."

"Don't say that, Con. We should make allowances for strong temptation."

"Temptation! Why, that's the strangest part of it all. Who would ever have thought that Guy could be tempted, except by some bait which tended to his own good?"

"He is not, I suppose, made of stone," Regy says, with a kind of *shiver* in his voice, which, to a less pre-occupied companion, might have revealed much that the speaker never intended to disclose; "and Lizzie Fairholme was very beautiful. Poor girl! she is ready to make any sacrifice——"

"Oh! don't talk of her, Redge, if you love me. A scheming, artful——"

"She is no schemer, neither is there a grain of artifice in her nature. Of folly and ambition no one can acquit her, but she is not the first girl in her station who has shown herself unable to resist the love-making—I suppose"(poor Regy rather bitterly parenthesises) "that he under-

stands *that*—of a gentleman. And besides, you should remember that Lizzie is, on her father's side, as well connected (if that kind of stuff deserves to be taken into consideration) as we are, if not better; and, most important fact of all, he kept her in utter ignorance of the main reason why it behoved him to keep the marriage secret."

"What an atrocious shame! Such horrible selfishness, too! And you say that even now she has not told him that she knows all?"

"She had not when I left her two hours ago. But, Con, in all this, what just now worries me the most, though you seem to think so little of it, is the loss of her note—the one she wrote in order to make the telling of this miserable story less trying to me. If it should be found——"

"But it won't be. You say you had it in the hansom, after you and Dixon got in?"

"Yes, I am almost certain of that; and probably, in taking my handkerchief from my

breast coat-pocket, it was blown away into the street."

"And was run over in a moment by carriages and wheels. Don't bother yourself, old fellow, about that, but tell me more about her. You say that her married life does not appear to be quite a success?"

"Anything but that. She lives in wretched lodgings, scarcely ever sees Guy, and is kept terribly short of money; and yet, poor child, she is ready, as I said before, to make any sacrifices for his good. She will consent to her marriage being still longer kept secret, to——"

He was interrupted by the entrance of Colonel Temple's servant, who brought a message from his mistress to the effect that the latter requested his presence without delay in their apartments.

"All right," Conrad, in his usual *insouçiant* way, said; adding to Reginald, "I shall be back in five minutes. And then he lounged

indolently away to his wife's sitting-room.

Laura was there waiting for him, looking pale, but resolute; and there, also, standing with his back towards her, and looking out (his hands in his pockets) of the window, was Hartwell Davison. She had read the letter hastily, but her quick intellect did not require many minutes to make her thoroughly cognizant of the "situation." Hart, in saying what he had done, had told her only the simple truth, namely, that, in order to prop a falling house, the banker had conceived and carried out the ingenious idea of making her, a portionless girl, the *apparent* heiress to money which had never in fact existed. The £200,000 *credited* to Joe Ripley, was a mere matter of moonshine; but the "name" of possessing those same thousands saved the bank; and, as poor Lolo bitterly told herself, bought her—under false pretences—a husband.

"You won't be such a fool as to say anything

about it to the Colonel?" were Hartwell's first words after he had given her, as he thought, time to digest the ill-news which he had brought her. "You see, there's no occasion in life to do it. No one has been defrauded; and that kind of thing——"

She stopped him with an imperious gesture, and laying her hand on the bell, rang it loudly.

"You will repent of this," Hartwell muttered between his teeth. But Laura, half, perhaps, instigated by the fear that "deliberation" *might* turn her from the path of right, paid no attention to his words. It was then that she sent her message to Conrad, and half a minute or so later that unsuspecting individual made his appearance in the room.

She flew to him at once, and in a few hurried words put him—half bewildered though he was—in possession of the main facts of the case. Then she showed him the banker's letter, and Conrad Temple knew for a certainty that

instead of a rich heiress he had married a penniless wife!

His first words were addressed to Hart, who, never imagining for a moment that any man in his senses could be the marrer of his own fortunes, stood quietly waiting the opportunity of advantageously putting in his word.

"I shall be glad to know, sir," Conrad said, "how this letter came into your possession. I gather, from its import, that it is not addressed to you; and, moreover, it appears to me very clear that the writer did not intend that it should be opened till after his death, an event which, I hear, has not yet occurred, and——"

"Sir," broke in Hartwell, resolved to try the effect of bluster, but inwardly beginning to feel some nervous trepidation, "I am not accustomed to be spoken to in the tone you have chosen to adopt; and as I am a gentleman like yourself——"

"Much obliged for the comparison; though I

might perhaps, had I time to do so, question the truth of your affirmation; but as matters stand, I prefer simply repeating the question of whence did you abstract this letter?"

"And I demand by what possible right you ask such a question? I come to you as a friend——"

"He did not, Con," struck in Laura. "He came to extort money, as he has done before. *I* never knew what you do now—till to-day; but he has thrown out hints, and—oh! how I wish he would go, that I might tell you all."

"Very well, then—go he shall, for I rather want to be enlightened. Now, look here, you sir," to Hartwell, "I am sorry to appear uncivil, but——"

"I quite understand—Mrs. Temple busy, and all that kind of thing. Sorry I didn't bring better news; and if you will oblige me by returning the letter——"

"Certainly not—at least not till I have as-

certained whether you have any right to its possession."

"Well," interrupted Hartwell, livid with rage, "I call that about as pretty a bit of swindling as I ever happened to fall in with!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth before Conrad, who had previously rang the bell, threw the door open wide, and calling aloud from the head of the staircase, desired that a policeman might be sent for.

"Oh! Mr. Davison, you had better go—you had indeed," said Laura.

And apparently the man shared her opinion; for, with a bitter scowl on his face, he pushed rudely past Colonel Temple, and made the best of his way downstairs. At the bottom he turned, and looking up at Courad, shouted out, for the benefit of several persons who happened to be within earshot,

"You will hear from me again. In the meantime, I wish you well out of it!" And then,

swinging the heavy house-door open with a bang, he took himself away from sight and hearing.

"Oh, Con!" said poor Lolo, the moment they were left alone, "how dreadful this is! What *will* you say to me? Instead of my being an heiress, you have married a perfect beggar!"

"Perfect—I believe you!" said Conrad drily—so drily that Laura, humbled and half bewildered by the shock she had sustained, felt hurt by his tone, and turned away to hide the tears which were welling to her eyes.

He came softly behind her, and stole his arm round her waist.

"Keep up your spirits, dear old woman," he said; "and if what that brute of a fellow tells us is true—and, upon my soul, it looks like it—remember that we've got something still to keep the wolf from the door. I never had, as you know, any great fancy for marrying an heiress——"

"It's so good of you to say so!" said Laura, doing her best to choke back her tears. "But it is hard to have nothing!"

"Nothing! With your jolly temper, and kind, unselfish heart! I tell you what it is, Lolo, I like you better without a sixpence than I should any other woman in the world with a thousand pounds a day! And if I ever regret being First in the Field, may my precious £20,000 turn out to be a delusion and a sham!"

It was thus that Conrad Temple comforted his wife; but, albeit he never for a moment regretted not having been tempted to hush up the matter, there were times when, before he grew accustomed to the great change which Hartwell Davison's discovery had made in his circumstances, he felt strongly inclined to anathematise, in no measured language, the man who had done him so signal a dis-service.

The poet's famous lines—

"Where ignorance is bliss,
'Tis folly to be wise,"

were never more fully verified than in the singular and never-to-have-been-anticipated misfortune which had overtaken Conrad Temple and his wife.

CHAPTER XVI.

IT was agreed between this singularly-situated couple (and as a proof of the Colonel's delicacy of feeling, I may here mention that after the scene recorded in the last chapter, he treated his wife's opinions with far more outward deference than had been the case when she carried about with her the prestige of an heiress,)—it had then been agreed between them that, for the present, and till Mr. Davison, who had shown signs of returning consciousness, should be well enough to return to business, no steps should be taken by Conrad towards making public the deception which the banker had so successfully practised.

"He certainly does not deserve to have seven thousand a year thrown into his coffers," Con said one day to Laura. "Sometimes I think the money ought to be ours, and then——"

"It can't be ours, since it was obtained by fraud," Laura said, hastily; for there was just enough of right and reason in her husband's doubts, to make her fear the *possibility* of his swerving from the strict path of right.

"That's true, of course; but, all the same, I am glad that the incumbrances were cleared off dear old Temple Court Twenty thousand nearly went there—*your* portion, we will call it, my dear Lo—and I only hope that your honesty does not carry you so far as to make you think it necessary to offer restitution to some imaginary wronged one there?"

Laura, having satisfied him on that head, expressed a hope—one that was certainly not conceived in charity—that Hartwell Davison would never, by reason of the deed which he had

brought to light, be bettered in his circumstances.

In this wish, not only Conrad, but Sir Miles Grafton—the only friend who was as yet admitted "behind the scenes"—cordially joined. The latter received the announcement that "Lolo never had had a sixpence" with a calmness which astonished Conrad far more than it did his wife.

"Do you know, Lolo," the Colonel said, laughing, "I really think the old boy means to make it up to you in his Will."

But Laura looked shocked, and prayed him not to say such horrid things. In her own mind, she still cherished the hope that Lady Grafton would recover.

Meanwhile, Reginald, who had heard no tidings of his lost letter, was feeling greatly distressed and disappointed at the weakness of character displayed by Lizzie, in that she could

neither summon courage to reveal to Guy the fact that his conduct was known to his brothers, nor permit them to speak to him on the subject.

"I *cannot* do it, dear Reginald—do not ask me," she would say, piteously. "I feel I have neither strength nor courage to bear harsh words, and Guy would be so very angry."

"But you *promised*, dear," Reginald said once, very gently; and Lizzie seemed struck by the mild reproach.

"I know—I will try," she said; but the days passed by without the effort being made, and, in the meantime, Regy, over-excited and anxious, fell ill. So ill that—though no danger was apprehended—his mother was telegraphed to, to come and nurse him.

Mr. Davison was at that time slowly recovering, whilst Miss Bainbridge was, *as* surely, making rapid progress towards the tomb.

Having been made aware of the hourly-increasing danger, Guy now rarely—save for

short intervals—left the house, and a dismal watch, in truth, was that which he shared with "Haggie." Haggie, who, in that prim cap of hers, and in a garb suited to the occasion, seemed to be endowed for the nonce—so unremitting was her attendance on the invalid—with supernatural strength.

For the chief portion of those dreary days, the poor old lady—who was possibly realising, late in her day of life, the melancholy truth that she could carry nothing away with her to the grave—lay, if the bulletins from the sick room were to be credited, in a state of demi-somnolence.

Guy's former alarms regarding Miss Haggerstone's influence over his godmother—alarms which, after all, had never assumed any very severe or even tangible form—had of late greatly subsided. No secret had been made of the fact that, less than a week previously, Miss Bainbridge had duly made her Will—which

Will had been properly attested and signed by the two of her upper-servants who had lived with her the longest—Mr. Crouch the butler, and her own maid. Only the day before the enactment of that highly-important ceremony, Guy had passed a considerable time in the sick-room, and had left it thoroughly well satisfied with his prospects, and without a shadow of misgiving as regarded the intentions towards him of his aged and infirm relation.

But for the satisfaction which he felt in gazing on and appraising the furniture, plate, &c., which were one day to be his own, he would have found the dulness of that waiting period to be almost unendurable.

For how long a time, and with what intensity, from his youth upwards, he had loathed the ugly surroundings of that gloomy, old-world-looking drawing-room; and now he longed for the time (it was a petty feeling, certainly, but then, as the reader must, I think, have noticed,

there was a good deal of what may be called *pettiness* in Guy Temple's nature) when he could take his revenge, not only on those senseless articles of furniture, but also (posthumously) on the woman who had so long foolishly over-valued and cherished them, by bringing the (by him) despised Lares and Penates to ignominious auction.

As he sat at his solitary meal, with solemn Mr. Crouch—the Crouch over whose destiny, in so far as the man's "place" was concerned, *he* would so soon reign supreme—waiting upon him with all due outward respect, Guy's thoughts —as was only natural—turned greatly upon his own domestic affairs, and on the marriage which it was his intention, immediately after Miss Bainbridge's death, to announce to his family as an event that was *to be*. He felt no misgivings regarding any possible objections which his "people" might raise to the match. From them he had been separated in such early childhood,

that, being now his own master, to apply for his parents' consent was, he told himself, a mere matter of form. And then, on her father's side, Lizzie's "family," albeit they had hitherto so entirely cast her off, was as "good" as his own, if not better; whilst as regarded that other "tiresome complication," the one which Lizzie had lately made known to him, why, they could go abroad for a time—such things were easily managed—if only, he added to himself, Lizzie would be reasonable, and not make a fool of herself. It was thus that Guy Temple, secure as he felt himself to be of a goodly heritage (for it was well known that Miss Bainbridge had never spent half her income), and entertaining not the faintest suspicion that his secret either had, or was likely to become known to any human being save himself and Lizzie, settled matters comfortably enough with a conscience which, sooth to say, had not hitherto in his lifetime given him much trouble. He saw very

little (necessarily), during those few melancholy days, of his wife, who, as we already know, was proving herself sadly deficient in the moral courage which is one of the best gifts that Providence can accord to woman.

CHAPTER XVII.

IT came at last—as it must do to us all—that hour when, however much we may have "fainted and feared to live alone," we realise the awful fact that,

"All alone—so Heaven has willed—we die."

It came, at last, to one of the least loved and useful of God's creatures, as surely as it may—so inscrutable are the ways of Providence!—to the wise statesman in his prime of manhood, the precious bread-winner of a large and happy family, the dearly loved and sinless child in whom all a mother's hopes and prayers had, from its very birth, been centred!

"She must have gone off like a lamb, poor lady, the nurse says," was Mr. Crouch's comment on the sad event, when, after announcing, in a befittingly solemn tone, to Guy Temple that Miss Bainbridge was no more, he remained for a few minutes, with the bright early sun of a superb August morning shining into the room, dwelling on "particulars" by the "heir's" bedside. "She couldn't have suffered, sir, nor made a sound not louder than a babby, for Mrs. Benson had been up looking at her, sleeping as calm as calm, not half an hour before, and, says she, 'You might have knocked me down with a feather when I saw what had happened."

Hard and self-engrossed though he was, and albeit the aged woman who lay dead so near him had never, by anything approaching to motherly tenderness, bound him to her by ties of affection, Guy could not hear quite unmoved that the friend and relation who had for so many years stood to him in the light of a parent,

would never praise or blame him more. He was not, however, the kind of man to waste time in sentimental reflections, and very soon—almost before he had finished dressing himself—came the feeling of intense relief, in that the time of his probation was over, and that in his goings out and comings in he need no longer trouble himself as to whether or not his prospects in life might be seriously affected by his movements.

Immediately after breakfast, at which meal Miss Haggerstone did not make her appearance, Guy sallied forth to make public the *loss* which he had sustained. His first visit was to Green's Hotel, where he found both Conrad and his wife fully disposed to consider the demise of Miss Bainbridge as a very opportune relief.

"Surely it will simplify matters," Laura, after Guy's departure, said. "With three thousand a year, he will be able to make it all right about poor Lizzie, and he *may* never

know that she, poor girl, was driven to betray the secret. Regy says that she seems quite afraid of him. How glad I shall be to greet her as a sister! Regy thinks her so very nice, and there is no better judge than he. If *only* the secret can be kept!"

"If *only!* But there's the rub. What secret *is* ever kept? However, we must hope the best, and this death is certainly very opportune. And now, see!" taking up a sheet of written-upon notepaper, "what I have said to this scoundrel who has dared to suppose that I will go shares with him in the event of the Davison mystery being hushed up." And Con read aloud the following words:—

"SIR,—If anything could make me consider you a greater rascal than I did before, it would be the reading of the letter" ("That doesn't sound well; but what does it matter?") "which I have just received from you. Directly Mr. Davison is well enough to attend to business,

he will be put into possession of all the circumstances relating to this affair. In the meantime, I have communicated with Mr. Greatorex on the subject."

"You see," added Con, knowingly, "I want the fellow to understand that I think him quite capable of hocussing his uncle's physic."

"Oh! Con, how can you say such horrid things?"

"Because I think them, my dear. I don't believe that the original George Barnwell was half so bad as this one is capable of being. 'A woman beguiled *him*, and he did *kill*;' whereas this man is, I am convinced, capable of committing the worst crimes for filthy lucre only."

According to the directions left by the deceased, the funeral of the wealthy spinster was conducted very simply, and at the least possible expense.

"The last people in the world whom I wish to benefit are the undertakers," Miss Bainbridge

remarked on one occasion to "Haggie;" and it was to that useful personage—a good deal to the disgust both of Guy and the old family servants—that the paper containing Miss Bainbridge's written instructions regarding her interment was confided.

The Will, which had been drawn up by Messrs. Kennerby and Wilson (a firm which had "enjoyed the confidence" of the deceased for many years) remained in the hands of those gentlemen, and was to be read, according to custom and the directions of the deceased, after the funeral.

"How sanguine Guy is!" said Reginald, on the evening before the eventful day, to his mother. Freedom from agitation, together with the sound of her low voice, and the touch of her soft hand, had already proved of service to him; and there had even been some talk—into which, however, rather to Mrs. Temple's surprise, Reginald did not enter with his usual

gusto—of their all going down to Temple Court early in the following week.

"Well, dear," said Mrs. Temple, in answer to her son's remark, "I think—don't you?—that Guy has a right to be sanguine. After enduring the poor old lady's caprices so long——"

"Ah! mother, I was afraid you would say that. And I want you to feel that, whatever Guy has done, or may do, that is not right, there is the excuse of his having been, so early in life, given up to Miss Bainbridge's care."

"My dear boy!"

"Yes, mother, I do think so, and have for years been of the same opinion. There is nothing so lowering to the character as the sense of obligation; and *I* know that Miss Bainbridge used, perhaps from a good, though mistaken motive, to make Guy feel it. If, as you just now said, he *had* had only to endure caprices, the discipline in itself might have been of service to him——"

"Not to one of Guy's nature, I fear," said Mrs. Temple sadly.

"Well, mother, of course one can't positively say, but in my opinion he could hardly have had a worse chance, poor fellow! I have an idea," taking his mother's hand between his own, "that love and confidence between those who bring them up are absolutely necessary to make either boys or girls turn out well. Ah! mother, I sometimes think that, if my lot had been different, and if it had pleased God that I should have a son, how I would encourage him to tell me everything! I would never be harsh or stern to him—never let him——But," checking himself with one of his mournful smiles, "who am I that I should lecture on the bringing up of bairns? Only perhaps if poor Guy had had a mother like mine——"

They were interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Temple, who had just arrived in town, in order to be present (a necessary compliment, in his

opinion, to the remains of the lady who had made a rich man of his son) at the funeral. Miss Bainbridge was only a second cousin once removed, and Richard Temple had always, during her life-time, disliked his son's godmother; yet "there is such a thing," as *he* would have said, "as dooty, and that *dooty* obliged him to do honour to Miss Bainbridge's bones."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT was all—the funeral obsequies, that is to say—over, and in the large front drawing-room (the dingy room which contained the old china ornaments so coveted by "Haggie," and the ponderous furniture which Guy destined in his own mind to the hammer) all those who were or might be interested in the matter, were assembled to hear the reading of the Will. All, with the exception of Regy, who had with some difficulty persuaded his mother to leave him for an hour by himself.

"You know, Mammie, I shall expect you to tell me all about it," he said. And so he coaxed her into doing his behests.

Mr. Kennerby was a dapper little man of sixty, with a young, smooth face, and a redundancy of iron-grey hair. He was addicted, as a rule, to facetiousness, but on the present occasion he seemed to have lost all desire to perpetrate the mildest of jokes. Possibly his knowledge of the contents of the will may have thrown, as it were, a wet blanket over his spirits.

The blinds had been all drawn up, and the jocund light, for the first time for nearly a week, streamed in upon the old well-preserved Axminster carpet, and on the faded table-cover, which, many a year before, the hands of the poor lady who had just been laid in her last resting-place, had embroidered. None of the chairs could with justice be called "easy;" but into the two which looked the least decidedly uncomfortable, Richard Temple and his son Guy had dropped. Mrs. Temple and Laura were on a sofa, not far from the spot where Mr. Kennerby, nursing

a neat leg, encased in fine lavender cloth, upon his left knee, was seated on a *priedieu*, with the intention, as Conrad afterwards declared, of looking non-professional and young. Con himself, with his hands in his pockets, was lounging against the window-ledge; whilst "Haggie," in deep mourning, looking very red and flurried, had placed herself on a large ottoman, upon which, with their backs towards her, were also located a lady and gentleman of mature age, who were vaguely supposed to have claims on the property of the deceased. These, together with the medical man who had attended Miss Bainbridge through her illness, and the clergyman who had sprinkled ashes on her coffin lid, made up the sum of those who were present at the reading of the will.

Mr. Kennerby broke the seals slowly, and after clearing his throat, as though to command silence, began. He was not a sensitive man, but, as he afterwards told Mrs. Kennerby, he would rather

have stood for an hour in the pillory than have, then and there, performed the task that was required of him.

The contents of Miss Bainbridge's last Will and Testament were briefly as follows :—

After the usual preliminaries, certain small legacies to old servants were mentioned first. Then followed a bequest of one hundred pounds to Miss Julia Haggerstone, "as a token of the testator's sense of that highly respectable person's unvarying attention." A similar sum was devised to "my godson and relative, Guy Temple of Temple Court." Whilst the whole of Miss Bainbridge's fortune, with the exception of the above-mentioned legacies, was, by the will of the testatrix, to devolve upon Reginald Temple, third son of Richard Temple, &c., &c.

The document, as read in a low but distinct voice by the lawyer, ended with these words:

"And whereas it had formerly been my intention to make the aforesaid Guy Temple my

sole heir, I hereby declare that the said intention was laid aside in consequence of its having come to my knowledge that the said Guy Temple did, in the month of September last, connect himself by marriage with Miss Lizzie Fairholme, of the Lees Farm. The marriage was performed at St. Ogg's Church, in the City; and as the said Guy Temple did not see fit——"

Mr. Kennerby had read thus far, before Guy, almost paralysed as it seemed by the blow, made any attempt to interrupt him; but of a sudden, he recovered his powers of speech, and springing from his seat, he endeavoured to wrench the parchment out of the lawyer's hand. But the latter held it fast.

"Good God!" cried Guy, "what is all this farrago of lies and humbug? There has been some horrible mistake—some infernal calumny——"

"I am afraid not," murmured Mr. Kennerby.

"I greatly fear, sir, that your relative was only too rightly informed——"

"*Informed*! The word is well chosen, on my soul! I married! You must be mad! I am fellow of a College, and—but I defy you to prove your case! You may look through every register in the kingdom——"

"Without result, I am well aware, if the names of Guy Temple and Lizzie Fairholme were to be searched for; but you and your wife—excuse me for a moment—were, I fancy, married under the respective names of Fletcher and Beamish, and as Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher you have been living; but," correcting himself suddenly, and rising, with angry impatience (as it *appeared*, but in reality the old family lawyer was feeling more for those to whom his duty had obliged him to give pain, than he cared to let appear), from his seat—"I really must apologise," he said, addressing himself chiefly to Mrs. Temple and Laura, "for the annoyance—ahem—that I

have given. My professional duty obliged me to read aloud the Will of my late client, and Mr. Guy Temple's outbreak—but I make every allowance for his state of mind—and—and under the circumstances of this very painful case, perhaps I had better put off the remainder of the reading till another opportunity, and say good morning for the present."

After this, Mr. Kennerby, nothing loth, it may be presumed, took himself from the room; an example which was speedily followed by all, save the members of a family on whom the heavy blow—one which all felt would tell terribly against the respectability of the Temples of Temple Court—had fallen.

There was no chance, no hope of concealment now; and Guy, driven, on this dire emergency, to seek sympathy and counsel from his near kindred, felt that no alternative was left to him save that of lowering himself in the dust of enforced repentance, and humbly confessing all!

CHAPTER XIX.

FAR away (yet only for a short period) from England, the following up of this story must now take my readers. Far away—comparatively speaking, that is—for in reality they are going to be carried no greater distance than to Lower Brittany, in a small town in which little visited part of France Guy Temple and his wife had gone to hide their heads.

It was the choice of the former that, till he should decide on what really distant country he should adopt as his own, the small hotel known as "Le Saumon" was to be their temporary home.

Quimperlé is a pretty town, with a rapid salmon river running through it, the banks of which are crowded with large trees, and are tolerably precipitous. A pleasant enough place for travellers to spend an hour or two in; for, from the windows of the little hotel, the country people, in their picturesque national costumes, look different from the same class at home, and there is also an attraction in the strange guttural language, unlike any other in the world, save Welch, which, in the warm Summer-time, rises through the open upper windows to the traveller's ears. But, amusing as Quimperlé may be to—as I before said—spend an idle hour in, few places that I wot of are less adapted to satisfy the wants or wishes of those who, halting in that quiet spot, are, for any cause whatsoever, desirous of escaping either from their own thoughts or from one another. A handsome couple—as the country-people, in their uncouth tongue, remarked to one another

—were the two, who, silently, and not arm-in-arm like lovers or newly-wedded pairs, sauntered down the river's banks—she tall and fair, and upright as a young pine, he slightly stooping, his grey eyes lowered to the ground, and with a *glum*, grave look which set men—after they had gazed upon her youth—and brilliant beauty—wondering greatly.

After the terrible disclosure which, during the space of a few hours—scarcely more—had sufficed to make an altered man of self-seeking, little-to-be-relied-on Guy Temple, that unhappy individual, feeling the publicity of his disgrace to be inevitable, decided on leaving England at once. This resolution—one which none present deemed it advisable to combat—he made known to his relatives, before—after the memorable reading of Miss Bainbridge's Will—they went their separate ways.

"I shall leave England to-night. You," to Conrad, "will, I suppose, lend me £300, to pay back

that accursed Fellowship money; and you can say if you like," this in a low voice, and hesitatingly, "that—that the marriage being under a feigned name, I felt considerable doubts as to its legality. However," seeing something in his brother's face which did not encourage further confidence on that score, "you can do as you think best. I leave everything in your hands, and——"

"And in mine, I hope, Guy," Laura, coming forward, in her frank, cheerful way, said. "Mother and I have been hatching a plot upon the sofa there, about Lizzie. She knows nothing, of course, of all this tiresome business" (this was tactful Mrs. Conrad's name for the discovery of Guy's dishonesty; and yet the proverb that *le nom ne fait rien à la chose*, is still quoted as an axiom!), "and we think it would be such a good thing for me to go and see her. What do you think, Guy? Con always says I like to have a finger in every pie. And about

your leaving England to-night!—why, she couldn't be ready—poor thing!—you know."

Guy seemed scarcely listening to what she said. Self had been so long his first object, that to give his attention at such a time to aught besides could hardly, perhaps, be expected of him! He had sunk into a desponding attitude (a family one, it would almost appear, in cases of mental trial, for Richard Temple's head was also between his hands, whilst his elbows were pressed upon his knees), and was bitterly reflecting on the fact that, at that moment, he had not a shilling which he could legally call his own! And—but that circumstance, I must do him the justice to say, did not add to his misery—all that he had once fondly believed would be his, was now the property of his blind brother—the brother who could never whilst he lived *enjoy* life, and to whom a "balance at his bankers," was a thing of no consequence whatever. Once the idea flashed across his mind that Reginald *might* offer to help him in his

straits; but then, swift upon that thought, came the recollection of Regy's goodness, his high-mindedness, his detestation of all that is base and mean; and, the lower nature not being able to comprehend the higher, Guy could not manage to take much comfort from the pleasing possibility which vanished almost as soon as it had presented itself to his mind.

During the first moments of not-easily-to-be-forgotten and most painful excitement which had followed on Mr. Kennerby's exit, it had not occurred to Guy to wonder how it came about that Miss Bainbridge had, all of a sudden, and only a few days before her death (for such he felt well assured was the case) become aware of the misconduct which she had so heavily punished; but, as he sat there, brooding over his great calamity, there suddenly came *booming* athwart his bewildered intellect, the idea that in order to bring about this terrible revolution in his affairs, *treachery*, and that of the

vilest kind, must have been at work! But who was the traitor?—that was the next question. Was his worst foe one of his own household? Could it be that the wife—so called—of his bosom, had wantonly betrayed his secret? Could she, silently, and with malice aforethought, have done him this dishonour? These were the questions he was asking himself, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and Laura's clear voice said—

"Well, Guy, I'm going. Silence is supposed to give consent, and I shall take yours for granted." And, having so said, Mrs. Conrad, after kissing her mother-in-law on the forehead, and nodding her head, with an expressive gesture, to her husband, flitted from the room, and had herself conveyed forthwith to Well Street.

Lizzie was sitting all alone, and feeling (the death of some one among us *does* bring cheerfulness at times to others) less depressed than had latterly been her wont. She had a letter

—I grieve to say it, for I wish you to think well of this poor young creature—*quand même*, from Charley Askew in her pocket, and that letter—albeit she had promised (and intended to keep that promise truly) that she would never voluntarily see again the man she worshipped—had comforted her lonely heart. It was so precious to her to be loved! Once, before she had known what love was, this girl had given herself up to dreams of ambition, thinking—ah, so foolishly!—that their highest realization would satisfy the cravings of young, and fresh, and beautiful eighteen; but now she had learned how worse than futile had been her plans and hopes, whilst, at the same time, alas! the passionate heart had wakened up within her, and her fate in this life being sealed, very dark and dreary had seemed to poor impulsive Lizzie the prospect which lay stretched before her.

But, with the death of Guy's old relation,

there came hope for her! With judicious management, *he* need never know that she had ever—driven by stress of circumstances—betrayed his secret. Lizzie's trust in Reginald was as her faith in Gospel Truth, and—now that the poor old lady's death had given them wealth, why, all things would of course go smoothly; and perhaps—ah! there, I fear me, lay the sweetener of her cup—in the world in which she would be called to live, she might sometimes (one short moment of such bliss would be, she told herself, ample recompense for long years of pain) meet face to face the man whose letter, breathing mad words of adoration, had been clasped that day with feverish joy to the lips and bosom of the woman whom the writer had made, in heart and spirit, all his own.

The unexpected visit—announced, with exceeding wonder (for Laura's carriage was still handsome, and her footman tall) by Mrs. Payne her-

self—of Mrs. Conrad Temple, broke in upon this half guilty reverie, and Lizzie, startled and confused, rose up in her tall, grand young beauty to receive her visitor.

They met—for such was Laura's will—like sisters; and then seated close together on the hard horse-hair sofa, with the dirty rag-like looking "anti-macassar" hanging about that comfortless article of furniture, the colloquy began—

"I have come, dear," Laura said—for she was not the woman to beat about a bush, "to tell you that everything is known."

"Everything! Oh, what *shall* I do?"

"Everything, I mean, about the marriage. Miss Bainbridge found it out before she made her will, and has, in consequence—we are so very sorry, but it is better you should know all at once—left all her money to Reginald."

Lizzie took the announcement very quietly, not moving—as Laura Temple noticed—a single

muscle of either face or body; and then, after a few minutes' silence, said:

"Guy will be dreadfully angry, I am afraid. I wonder who it was that told of him?"

"Ah, who indeed? We did not talk *that* over, but I suspect that a letter which Regy lost must have fallen into the old lady's hands."

"The letter that *I* wrote! Oh! Mrs. Temple——"

"Call me Laura, dear. I want so much to *feel* that we are sisters."

"You are very good—far better than I deserve you should be to me; but I am so frightened—so distressed—Guy will suspect and question me——"

"And if he does, dear Lizzie, you must own the truth. You must tell Guy that you were seen walking with poor Regy, and that to clear *him* from false suspicions you revealed the truth—"

"And I could say, which is also the truth," said Lizzie, whose undercurrent of thought ran

all the while upon the chances for and against *that* portion of *her* life's episode in which Charley Askew bore so large a part, being concealed from her husband. "I could truly say that I met Reginald by accident, and that then——"

But here she stopped, confused and agitated, for Colonel Askew had been her companion when the officious Dixon pointed her out to his blind master; and so, feeling the meshes of the tangled web around her, Lizzie, who had not "practised to deceive," betrayed to observant Laura that there was possibly more behind the scenes than she, in her simple philosophy, had dreamt of.

To be "beat" in anything she undertook was a state of things to which Mrs. Conrad had an especial objection; and, deeming it for the advantage of all parties, and, above all, for hesitating Lizzie herself, that the truth, and the whole truth, should be told, she went on with her pleading, thus:

"Anything, dear, is better between married people than a mystery. Guy may be angry at first——"

"Oh, *so* angry! And he does so hate what he calls a scene!"

"But why should there be a scene? I quite agree with Guy that they are odious things, and worse than useless. As people say of a thunderstorm, they spoil good weather and make bad worse. Oh, no—let us avoid scenes, by all means. Try to pass it off lightly——"

"But it is so difficult with Guy to be what you call 'light;' he is so——"

"My dear Lizzie, forgive me for uttering what may seem like flattery; but at nineteen, and with a face like yours——"

They were interrupted by the sudden opening of the door, and the next moment Guy, looking hot, angry, and flustered, stood before them.

Laura rose at once, with the intention of tak-

ing leave, but Lizzie laid her hand beseechingly on her arm.

"Guy," she said, summoning all her courage to her aid, "Mrs. Temple has been advising me —so kindly—to tell you the truth, which is, that you owe all your disappointment—that you owe this discovery, in short, to me."

"And she drew herself up," as Laura, in describing the scene afterwards to Conrad, said, "like a young queen, and, for a moment, as though boldly confronting him; but after a second or two she regularly broke down, poor child, and bursting into tears, she entreated me to tell him all, and then rushed from the room."

Mrs. Temple told her tale well and briefly; and when all was said—the all to which he had listened in moody silence, she made him promise that he would not be too hard upon his wife. Which promise he virtually kept, behaving altogether better than Lizzie

had dared to hope; but his was not, as she well knew, the generous nature that draws a sponge over offences past, and wipes out their memory, then and there, for ever. That she would probably, through all her after-days, be made, from time to time, to feel how guilty *she* had been, whilst *his* far heavier offences would be efficaciously blotted from the tablets of his memory, Lizzie was only too well aware, and the certainty did not tend to brighten the gloom that seemed to have settled on her life.

"You must stir yourself in earnest now," Guy, after he had in some degree eased his mind by growling out that she had made a confounded fool of herself, said. "There is no time for dawdling. We start at seven to-morrow morning."

"Oh! Guy, it isn't possible! There is everything to do, and bills to pay, and——"

"Bother! That will all be settled. How you *can* dwell and harp!—so like a woman!—

upon minor difficulties, when we are in the state that—your folly has brought us to! I tell you that they have got all the money amongst them, and that, therefore, the least they can do is to give us bread and cheese, and help us out of the country. So, as I said before, look sharp, and see that all is ready for a start to Southampton to-morrow morning."

A dreary sentence of banishment, and one which crushed poor Lizzie's heart within her to listen to. Where were now all those dreams of wealth, and grandeur, and those hopes—half guilty ones, alas!—of sometimes seeing again the man who had taught her the dangerous truth that there is a passion higher, mightier and more soul-engrossing than even the most exalted flight which earthly ambition has the power to take? Where, too, were gone the minor imaginary delights on which this girl, who had enjoyed so few of this life's pleasures, had been in the habit—for the mind cannot al-

ways be on the fullest and most exalted stretch —to recreate her fancy? Vanished into thin air!—dispersed, as the baseless fabric of a vision, into nothingness! There were no dresses now of velvet and of silk, the very forms and fashions of which poor foolish Lizzie had traced out in her mind; no jewelled ornaments, no horses, carriages, or footmen; for Miss Bainbridge, alas! was dead and buried, and had "left her fortune to others!"

And that she had so left it, was solely and entirely owing, as Lizzie could not but confess to herself, to her own fault—her own from the very beginning, most unpardonable fault; for had she not, in order to satisfy her yearning after "position," committed the first sin—taken the first step which had led to all the rest?

Look at her now, as, in her bright, unfaded beauty, she is packing with her delicate hands the trunk which contains her scanty wardrobe! See the tears dropping from the long dark eye-

lashes, as she thinks, now of her unloved and *unattentive* husband, and anon of the man whose devotion, so delicately and with such high-breeding made manifest to her, has caused the world to be a different world from what it was before to Lizzie Temple, and tell me, if you can, that you do not pity her!

"She has brought it all upon herself," you may feel inclined to say; but in that she has so acted, *I*, for one, feel that she is not the less an object of compassion, for remorse is added to misfortune—a remorse which, though perhaps the offspring of her sorrow, is not for that reason the less hard to bear.

And, let me pray you, glance at her once more, as Guy, cross from sea-sickness, and looking white and unkempt in his ugly travelling-cap, is ordering, at the Hotel de France, at St. Malo, the early dinner which is to be throughout the day their sole substantial meal.

"Bifteek et pommes de terre, c'est ça," said

the waiter of the hotel, who had been standing, napkin in hand, whilst "Monsieur" looked over the carte. "Pour deux—c'est ça. Monsieur ne desire pas autre chose?—un plat de douceur, une omelette sucrée, un——"

"Merci!—no. Madame mange pas; you wouldn't eat it, you know. Madame n'aime pas those things. That will do, merci!" And then to Lizzie, who, as Guy was well aware, detested "meat," and existed chiefly upon "trash," he added—"They have nothing tolerably wholesome here but beefsteak, and it's a great thing in travelling to be abstemious."

Now there was nothing (or, at least, there *would* have been nothing, if Lizzie's tastes in gastronomy had yet to be discovered) positively reprehensible in Mr. Temple's conduct on this occasion, but there was a *meanness* in the conduct of the affair, which revolted his wife, and set her thinking drearily on her hard fate in that, with a man so utterly, and in every

way uncongenial, she was doomed to spend the future of her life.

What wonder was it that, with such antagonism as this existing between the pair, those who watched them from the market-place in quiet Quimperlé, taking their daily stroll together, should, ignorant and unworld-taught peasants though they were, have suspected in their inmost mind that all was not with the handsome *Sassenach* couple as it ought to be?

The man's thoughts were all of his lost property, his blighted name, his ruined fortunes; and hers of her vanished love, the love that even to think of was a sin! The price which both had paid for their "whistle" was heavy indeed; but who is there amongst us that is wise enough, previous to a desperate venture, to sit down quietly and count the cost? Who, too, moreover, even if sensible enough to undertake the calculation, possesses, with the will, the power to cast up the future? And are

there not cases when not even the gift of prescience, foreseeing and foretelling evil, would suffice to save a man, driven onward by o'ermastering passion to his Fate?

CHAPTER XX.

ONCE more at Temple Court. Once more in the picturesque old house, beautiful, and enriched by the thousands which, by reason of the banker's trickery, had been lavished on it. Signs of wealth and comfort were now everywhere visible, for, the incumbrances having been cleared off the property, Richard Temple had his income of four thousand pounds per annum to spend as he chose, and his temper—always, however, his weak point—had become, by reason of his easier circumstances, decidedly less capricious than of yore.

Nearly six months have passed since the

death of Miss Bainbridge made, to his extreme wonder and distress, a rich man of Reginald Temple. His first thought had been to give over, with the exception of two yearly hundreds, the whole of the property to his bitterly disappointed brother; but this, by the terms of the Will, he found himself prevented from doing. As though Miss Bainbridge had foreseen such an intention on the part of her heir, she had provided against his alienating any portion of the property from himself. Moreover, beyond the sum of three hundred pounds, he had not, on pain of forfeiture, the power to diminish his income. The consternation into which the reading of this Will had thrown the relatives who had assembled to hear its provisions, had, as the reader may remember, caused Mr. Kennerby to delay reading the short codicil, containing the conditions just stated, to another opportunity; and Regy's disappointment, when he found that his generosity to his brother must perforce be

restricted to the "doling" out to him of a "pitiful" three hundred a year, was as great as it was sincere.

In this opinion (the opinion, that is, that Guy was too hardly treated) the rest of the family, with the exception of Mrs. Conrad, very decidedly differed. The disgrace which he had brought upon their name was severely felt by all, and those who had not, like Mrs. Conrad, had their hearts softened by the sight of Lizzie's loveliness, her humility, and her grace, considered that a few hundreds per annum—enough, that is to say, and no more, to keep him and his wife "above want," in the retired spot to which they had betaken themselves—was fully as much good fortune as they deserved. It was in vain that Laura endeavoured to inspire in the breasts of her husband and his family a better and more kindly feeling towards the absent ones. With the exception of Regy, the facts that Lizzie was Farmer Beamish's niece, the

niece who had deceived and deserted him, and that Guy had so acted as to shame his honour as a gentleman, were not, by the Temple family, for the present, at least, to be either ignored or forgotten.

Colonel Temple and his wife were, during the Autumn and Winter, very frequent guests at the Court. The strange yet true story of Laura's imaginary heiresshood had, at the first, met with nothing but scornful unbelief from Richard Temple, whose indignation against all concerned, when the facts of the case became patent, was very great. At all times rather a puzzle-headed individual, the difficulty of comprehending *who* in the matter had been cheated, and whether or not it had been the duty of his son to give up a large fortune which belonged, as far as *he* could understand the matter, to *nobody*, was so far of use in that it did, during the first "blush" of this curious affair, divert the mind of the owner of Temple Court from

dwelling, with outspoken regrets, on Conrad's loss.

"Besides, my dear father," Con would drily say, "it was you who urged me to be the First in the Field; and since the whole misfortune—(if misfortune you call the having Lolo, with a fortune of £20,000, for a daughter)—arose from your violence and precipitation, why, I think that the less *you* complain of what has happened the better."

In the meantime, Conrad and his wife both very wisely agreed on the expediency of selling The Firs, which charming home had been purchased by the Colonel from the proceeds of his famous speculation.

"It is not a large place, and if we had our £20,000 clear, we might manage to keep it," Conrad said one day to his wife. "I see my way to a safe seven per cent. for my money."

"Now, Con, you know what Regy says," Laura, playfully holding up a warning-finger, rejoined—"'Slow and sure is his motto.'"

"By Jove! you've no right to run down speculations! A wife all made up of paper wings! A regular sham! Do you know, Lolo, I have more than once awoke myself with laughing at the cleverness of the dodge."

"How you *can* laugh at it! I always feel so much more inclined to cry," Laura said, brightly.

"*You* cry! I don't believe there's a tear in your nature; and I'm glad of it, for I've no taste myself for the weeping-willow order of ladies. By the way, though, talking of money, &c., I heard yesterday that old Davison's affairs are anything but prosperous. I shouldn't wonder if the bank were to break after all."

"Really! How sorry I should be! Have you any idea of the reason? He has always had the name of being so very rich."

"And the 'name' went a long way in keeping him so; but——"

"You don't suppose," Laura asked hastily,

"that *our* story ever got about? I never uttered a syllable concerning it, except to our own family."

"Whilst I, on the contrary—for *our* story, as you call it, is much too good to keep to oneself—have told it a score of times——"

"Oh! Con, how could you?"

"How could I?—why, for no end of reasons. But I've no time to divulge even one of them now, for I promised to meet a man in the City who has some idea of buying The Firs."

Laura looked sad for a moment, for she had begun to love the place dearly; but it was both in her nature and among her principles to endure cheerfully the evils for which there was no cure, and therefore the cloud was soon chased from her brow, and the repining from her spirit.

And she had her reward. For her birthday gift—the one presented to her on the 20th of November, by her old friend Sir Miles—was

nothing less, as we shall shortly see, than the valuable property which she had grown to love.

Conrad returned home from his appointment in the City with news which, as he told Laura, was both good and "indifferent." The Firs was sold for nearly a third more than he had given for the place, and they had lost the home which had become dear to both.

This event happened on the eighteenth of November, and on the twentieth, almost before she had time to lament over her lost possessions, Laura Temple knew that the picturesque old house, with the rugged trees through which the Summer wind had played so soothingly, and the placid *mere* (Con *would* persist in calling it a pond) on which the water-lilies grew in such rank luxuriance, was her own!

There was no sad farewell now to say to sorrowing cottagers, no last looks to throw regretfully upon scenes of bygone pleasures, for all was Lolo's, and Conrad's also, inasmuch as it was hers.

"I shall be *too* happy now," Laura, brushing away one of the drops which was welling from her eyes, and that Conrad professed not to believe in, said, "Dear Sir Miles, you are too kind, too generous——"

"Not at all—mere selfishness, I assure you," rejoined this liberal giver. "I have grown accustomed to my own corner in The Firs drawing-room; and I am getting too old to change it for another."

CHAPTER XXI.

"AH, well, *you* may think so, Richard, and I trust and pray that you may be right; but *I* see the difference—the change from week to week; and if I am not greatly mistaken, the dear fellow is aware of it himself. Ever since the day when he put his own greatcoat—heated by exercise as he was—over little Jemmy Bateson's shoulders, Regy has been gradually failing; and yesterday, Dr. Andrews, when I pressed him hard with questions, could not deny that so it was.

Mrs. Temple—the woman whom so many of her acquaintances had decided to be "dry" and

uninteresting, that the libel—for libel it was—had almost helped to bring about ostensibly the truth, had, in thus rousing her husband's fears for Reginald, the object of inducing him, if possible, to leave his home for the mild climate of Cannes. Richard Temple, cold, self-engrossed, and little capable of strong human affection, was, as we know, as appreciative of, and as attached to, his blind son as it was in his nature to be. But albeit he did in some sort love the cheerful, sensible lad who had never, from his childhood upward, said or done a thing that was worthy of reproof, Richard Temple loved his own ease and comfort better; and for this cause he resolutely shut his eyes to the fact that Regy's always delicate health was failing fast. The temper likewise of the man was apt to be more seriously affected (when illness occurred in the family) than his feelings; and this fact, one which during her thirty years' experience of married life she had had ample opportunities of

testing, probably influenced Mrs. Temple's words whilst endeavouring, as we have seen, to work upon her husband's fears.

He answered her very crossly; at which she was not surprised, but that he should open his opposition by throwing blame upon Reginald, did both anger and astonish her.

"It's all your fault," he said, "for having brought up the boy in such a stupid womanish way. What business had he, because he found a dirty labourer's brat in the snow, to take off his own coat and put it on the child. Dixon must have been a fool to tell him of it——"

"Dixon had nothing to do with the matter—Regy's senses are very cute, and the child's shaking voice and chattering teeth made our boy lay his hand upon the little fellow's shoulder, and———"

"Well, that will do, I am sick of such nonsense; and as I don't agree with you that anything more than usual is the matter with Regi-

nald, I shall certainly permit of no move till after Christmas. Conrad and his wife will be here next week, for a fortnight, and when New Year's Day is over, we will see perhaps what can be done."

And this was all the concession that she could obtain for the loved one whose days she almost feared were numbered! Richard Temple would, when the bleak Christmas-time was over, "see," he had said, "what could be done;" and in the meantime Regy's precious life—the life that *might* be prolonged by his migration to a more genial clime, to one of the favourite spots on earth where he could "see the sunset," and feel "sure he'd rise the morrow," and in which he might breathe more freely of the outer air which had ever been his best and most efficient tonic, must linger on, cheerful still and uncomplaining, through the dreary Winter weather, shut within four walls, because forsooth the man whose will she was powerless to dispute declined to see

the evil that to her eyes was so terribly evident. Her only hope lay now in the possibility that Laura, whose wishes had once been *almost law* to Richard Temple, might be able to effectually exert her influence for Reginald's good. It was a feeble straw to which to cling, for the offence of the banker had been so heavy in Mr. Temple's sight that his offending daughter-in-law was inextricably coupled in his mind as an accomplice in Mr. Davison's guilt. On the subject of the "trick," his mind had grown to be in an almost morbidly uncomfortable state, and a good deal to Laura's distress (albeit she usually contrived both to conceal her annoyance and change the conversation with a laugh), her father-in-law, who had completely ceased to treat her with his former affectionate deference, was perpetually, and in his usual fretful manner, recurring to the "swindle" of which *his* family had been the victim. By constantly dwelling, in a one-sided fashion, on this one theme, he had thought

himself into the conviction that Conrad, in exposing the matter, and giving up his wife's fortune, had acted the part of a madman.

"And *you*," he said, on the first evening of the family Christmas gathering, when, in the gloaming, he and Laura chanced to be *tête-à-tête* for a few minutes in the drawing-room, "what business of yours was it to go straight to Conrad with the story that he has made such a fool of himself about? Why not have gone first to some one capable of advising you—to *me*, for instance?"

"Because I thought Con the properest person to decide," smiled Laura, who *sometimes*, when alone with Richard Temple, whom she neither liked nor respected, could be just a trifle saucy in her manner towards that thoroughly self-satisfied individual. "Surely, sir, you don't advocate the system of wives having secrets from their husbands?"

"Not at all. Certainly not. But there are

cases, and this was one, when deliberation was absolutely necessary. The more I think of this horrible business, the more I am convinced that Conrad acted like a fool. The idea of giving up nearly six thousand a year, which had never belonged to anyone, that I can make out, but you. Ah! it's all very well to laugh——"

"I beg your pardon, but you put it so funnily."

"Funnily! Good God! Where can you possibly see the joke? I declare, when I think of it——"

"But you mustn't think of it, sir. *I* never do. It is so awfully puzzling. Besides, I want to talk to you about poor Regy—he is looking so ill; and mother thinks he wants change so much."

"Well, let him go away, then. He is rich enough, God knows; though what he does with his money, is best known to himself."

"And to the poor, who call him blessed,"

murmured Laura, in a low tone. But Richard Temple caught her up at once.

"I don't know what you mean by 'blessed.' I reckon that most of those he helps are a blessed lot of impostors; and charity, in *my* opinion, ought to begin at home."

"But," said Laura, purposely ignoring this last remark, "I think—indeed, I am sure, that Regy would gain no good from his outing if Mrs. Temple did not go with him. Oh! Mr. Temple, won't you say she may? It is such a precious life. And if he were to die——"

He rose from his chair in impatient anger.

"What right have you," he said, "to allude to such things? *I* am the best judge of my own family affairs, and I have told Gertrude that after New Year's Day I will see what is to be done. Christmas is not the time for a country gentleman of large estate to be absent from his place; and Mrs. Temple ought to be as well aware of her duty in that respect as I am."

And so, *talking* of duty, but talking only, he went his self-satisfied way!

The first person amongst the friends who loved him, to whom Reginald Temple spoke of his death as likely to be near at hand, was his brother Conrad's wife. There was that in her cheerful, kindly, unsentimental nature which invited him to confidence. With Lolo he had no fear that a burst of tears, or any suchlike display of feeling, would be likely to follow on the first words, which he dreaded almost as much as he desired, poor lad, to utter. Could he have *seen* his mother's face, could he have looked into her eyes, and read therein the effect upon her feelings of his words, as he gradually and very gently led her mind towards the conviction that one of the *two*, who had been ever and always so much to each other, was "to be taken, and the other left," all would have seemed easier; but, seeing that he was debarred from this manifest advantage, Reginald, half

shrinking, poor lad, from the first utterance of that which seemed so like his own condemnation to death, and half longing for the melancholy comfort of sharing his dismal secret with a tender, womanly heart, determined, one dreary Winter's morning, a morning on which this world of ours—for the snow was falling in thick flakes from out of a dull grey sky—was looking its very worst, on talking openly to Laura concerning the subject of which his own mind was full.

He opened it, as is often the case when much consideration has been previously bestowed upon the choice of appropriate words, abruptly. He and Lolo were alone together in the small sitting-room looking south—an advantage which was on that especial day not particularly appreciable, and Mrs. Temple, as was her custom, had gone about her household concerns.

The snow was still falling steadily, sticking in white *dabs* upon the window-panes, and

totally obscuring the view outside. By children only, and to the young and happy, could that dull day in Christmas-time have been characterized as "merrie."

"I have been thinking," Regy, from his arm-chair by the fire, said, "whether it is wrong to wish for sudden death. The Bible tells us that to desire what is wicked is the same thing as being guilty of the deed."

"Not quite that; does it, dear? At least—"

"Well, only one case is specified; but one draws deductions, or, I suppose, ought to draw them, from that. It is one of the stumbling-blocks, *I* think—and there *are* so many in the way of faith in Revelation, that we are told that even for the sin of our passing thoughts we are to be held responsible. Thoughts which come so utterly unbidden, and the entrance of which into one's brain one can no more prevent than one can the beating of the heart against the ribs, or the sudden twinge of the toothache—it

does seem a little hard that wretched mortals are to be punished for *them!* Now, in the case of a poor creature like me, how can I help thinking—thinking always? And my last thought—Lolo, dear, you don't know how much I have longed to make *you* share in it—has been about *this*—this wish of mine to be spared the dread of immediate death—to escape the cruel leave-taking—to be ignorant, in short, like the beasts that perish, of the *nearness* of the moment when the curtain will fall. And ah! Lolo," he continued, after a few moments' pause, "I know I am a coward to wish this; and sometimes I fancy—it is, of course, *only* fancy—that I might be braver if I could *see;* but I have—I will own it to you—an unconquerable dread of death; and if I quite believed in the efficacy of prayer—"

"Oh! Regy, my dear boy, what does this mean? I thought that you——"

"Yes, I understand," he broke in hastily, "that you are shocked—you *must* be, it is only

natural; but if you had prayed as I did—prayed with a kind of agony of prayer for sight when mine was going, you would hardly wonder, seeing that I was not answered, at my doubts."

"But, Regy," said Laura, who felt both distressed and awed by the implied unbelief of one whom she had, in common with all who knew him, looked up to as to a being almost without a fault, "you are not a sceptic? You have faith in God—in the Bible—in our blessed Saviour?"

"I believe in what I can, dear Lolo; and since Death has been so near, I almost, I think, believe in *all*. The Love and Trust in the Love of Him who died for us which now so often comforts me could not, I feel persuaded, be implanted in the human breast if there were not a God and a world to come, in which amends will be made to those who have been born only to *endure*."

"But, Regy," persisted Lolo, "your life has been the life of a believer—you have been always good——"

"There is such a thing as being good for lack of opportunity to be bad, just as there are men and women who are bad because they are ever and always placed in temptation. And," with a quiet sigh, "I fear, if my heart could some little while ago have been looked into, much of the goodness of which you speak would not have been found therein. But, Lolo, dear, I must go back to what I was saying about Death——"

"But why say it, darling? Mother won't trust me with you if I let you talk of mournful things."

"But I *must* talk of them. I want her to be told—my poor, poor mammie!—that I am dying. She has been trying to persuade my father that I ought to go abroad, but it is all nonsense. I mean it is quite useless. I made Dr. Andrews tell me the truth, and he says that I may die any day; and, Lolo," clutching her hand, and holding it hard within his own, "mother *must* be told."

On the smooth, fair, boyish-looking forehead drops of perspiration had burst forth, and a faint gasp warned Laura that she at least must be calm. With a gentle touch she wiped, with her soft handkerchief, the damp from his brow, and then said, almost cheerfully,

"Would you like me to talk of this to mother, dearest? I will, if you wish it; but Dr. Andrews is not infallible—he may be mistaken."

"Oh! no. Do not think of that. I *feel* so certain he is right; and, Laura, another thing," —and here the gasp grew more deep, and the breath came from the pale lips with evident difficulty—"I should like—so very much—if my father sees no objection—to have Guy and Lizzie sent for. Lizzie ought to see her uncle—poor old man!—he has felt it all terribly; and, Laura, you will go and see him, won't you? I believe he thinks us proud! Ah! if he did but know how ridiculous pride looks when death, the leveller, is pointing to the grave!"

A faint smile, the very faintest that can well be imagined—it was one of the last signs of that keen sense of the ludicrous which had always been so marked a characteristic of Reginald Temple's idiosyncrasy—just sparkled over the momentarily bright face, and then left it sad and quiet as before.

"I made my Will," he said, "before I left London. That poor old woman had saved a good deal more than she ought to have done so I calculated about what the tenth part of her income for twenty years would come to, and that money I have left, in her name, to the poor. The rest—but you will know in time. I can just fancy," he added, playfully, "how curious you are looking! What is to become of *that?* And now, dear Lolo, won't you go (you know you are her own daughter) to poor mother? She will want comfort—she——"

But here Regy's efforts at composure came abruptly to a close. He was young enough to

feel ashamed of the tears which were welling up to his sightless eyes, and so, placing the thin hand, that trembled slightly as he did so, in such a fashion as to conceal from Laura the evidence of his emotion, he leant back in the wide, old-fashioned arm-chair on which so many hours of his weary days were passed, and in the silence which Laura (already absorbed in the thought of how best to execute her painful task) did not feel inclined to break, he relapsed once more into the normal occupation of the blind, that of "thinking," "thinking" mournfully.

CHAPTER XXII.

IT is the day of Guy Temple's expected arrival. Guy, the banished and dishonoured, who, with the young wife whose hopes had never, since the early days of her marriage, soared so high as a welcome for herself to Temple Court, had been summoned thither in all haste by telegraphic message. The ancient mansion, at no time a lively place of abode, is intensely sad and silent now, for Regy (Master Reginald, as the old servants call him) can never more, as they have all been told, come amongst them as of yore; and heavy were the looks and tearful the eyes of the many to whom Regy's

winning ways and words had so much endeared him.

The "turn" which Mrs. Temple's deep sorrow had taken, was a very trying one to those about her. Originally her temper had been excellent, but thirty years of existence with such a one as Richard Temple had sadly deteriorated it; and now that *he*, subdued and miserable, was no longer an object of alarm, she grew, under her great grief, painfully irritable. It was beautiful to see how Laura, untiring in her efforts at consolation, bore with a fractiousness and injustice which would have wearied out the patience of a less unselfish woman. A fortune, indeed, and a prize in herself, was the daughter-in-law, who had, "only through a fluke," become one of the family, which had so early learned to know her value!

Less than a week has elapsed since the conversation recorded in the last chapter took place, and Mrs. Temple, her eyes red with

tears, is sitting beside Regy's chair, with the hand, which must so soon be cold as "monumental marble," clasped within her own. He has been talking to her calmly, at last—for all taint of earthly passion has, since his bodily frame has become weaker than a reed, been cleansed from his thoughts and feelings—about Lizzie; and, for the first time, Mrs. Temple has learned the truth, that she has not been without a rival in her son's heart. Guessing, perhaps, that the discovery would not be without its bitterness, he, with all his old boyish caressingness of manner, said—

"I have told you of my past folly, mammie, because I know so well that you will take to your own inmost heart the girl who has been so close to mine; and you will never even hint to her that I was mad enough to worship her sweet face. You see, dear," he added, deprecatingly, "I never saw another to drive it from my mind. Promise, then, mother, dear—won't

you?—that you will love poor Lizzie for my sake."

And Mrs. Temple, who had never in her lifetime refused a request of Regy's, promised hastily (even as some wives promise at the altar) to love one who was to her almost a stranger, and the will to keep her word was strong; but *l'amour ne se commande pas*, and dead Regy's idol will never, while she lives, be loved as a daughter by Gertrude Temple.

The snow is lying thickly on the ground, and heavily weighing down the branches of the evergreens that adorn each side of the long "approach" to the grey old house, when, early in the afternoon of the last day in December, a carriage, bringing Guy and his wife to Temple Court, drives almost noiselessly to the door. Regy, after a night of more than usual suffering, has been during the morning very restless and uneasy. Such questions, asked each time

with increasing feebleness, as, "Are you *sure* that they will come to-day?"—"May not the snow prevent the trains from keeping time?" denoted only too plainly his fear that the travellers might arrive too late to find him still alive; and when, at the eleventh hour, the sound of wheels upon the deep snow outside made itself heard within doors, Regy's ears—the *still* acute-of-hearing ears of the blind—were the first to catch the sound, whilst he was the first to say, with a deep-drawn sigh of thankfulness, "They are come at last!"

"You have kept your promise—you have neither written to or seen *him* again?"

These were the dying lad's first words to Lizzie, when he found himself (he still seated in his accustomed place) alone with the weary, nervous girl, amongst whose good gifts that of self-control certainly could not be reckoned.

She was weeping bitterly. The sight of that

fair, almost boyish face—for, despite his two-and-twenty years, there were but faint traces of manhood either on Reginald's cheeks or lips—had (so altered was it, and yet so beautiful in its quiet purity) utterly overcome her, and she could only answer, between hardly-suppressed sobs, that she had, both in the spirit and to the letter, done his bidding.

"That's right," he said, cheerily. "I knew that I could trust you! And, look here, Lizzie, the great thing, as I said to you in London, is to keep out of the way of temptation, and so I have left a little money to Guy, on condition—don't be afronted, dear—that he and you will live for the next five years out of England. You will learn to love him in that time, and you—you will have other interests to keep you straight. But, Lizzie, one word more, give me again your word of honour—mind, this is a promise to a dying man!—that you will be true and faithful, whilst he lives, to Guy!"

"I will, so help me God!" she answered; and then Reginald took her hand in his and kissed it gently.

But Lizzie, in passionate sorrow, rested the fair, waving curls against her breast, and pressing her lips upon his forehead, let her tears fall there unrestrained.

"Oh! it is so hard to lose you," she sobbed. "I have so few to love me. I am come amongst strangers who—Regy!" she cried, seized with a sudden fear, for he was strangely still and motionless under her wild caress. "Regy! Ah, heaven!" And then a scream, loud and ungoverned, burst from her lips; for, utterly inexperienced in death-scenes though she was, even Lizzie Temple could perceive that it was no fainting fit which had caused the blind boy to be thus mute and unresponsive.

They came hurrying in, the mother first, but all too late for a last word—a parting look! Reginald's desire had been granted to him. He

had died the death from which we Christians pray every seventh day to be delivered, and had breathed his last whilst the kiss of the only woman he had ever loved was still warm upon his brow!

"He had outsoared the shadow of their night,
Envy and calumny, and hate and pain,
And that unrest which men miscall delight,
Can touch him not, nor torture him again;
From the contagion of the world's cold stain
He is secure, and now can never mourn
A heart grown cold—a head grown grey in vain!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

SIX years have elapsed since the death of Reginald Temple, and the pair to whom was bequeathed, in equal shares with Colonel Temple, the fortune of which Regy had been for so short a period possessed, are still abroad, and likely to remain so. For Guy has taken a liking to the "cheap" country in which a thousand a year is wealth; and Lizzie, who has by this time "other interests" in life, is well-contented to remain in exile. In truth there exists for her small temptation to go "home." Farmer Beamish is dead, Colonel Askew has been for three years the husband of a pretty girl whom

he married for love, and the Fairholme family—for the reason, probably, that her husband is "under a cloud"—have made no advances towards acknowledging Lizzie as a relation. Mrs. Temple, too, despite her promise to Regy (which the bereaved woman doubtless would, were she and Lizzie to come in contact, do her best to keep), has never shown any great eagerness for her daughter-in-law's society. The sorrowing mother has not yet been able to conquer her jealousy of the woman who shared Regy's love, and who, instead of herself, was the recipient of his last words, his final touch!

But she, the hard-to-comfort mourner for one whose "good that he did lived after him," is anything but an unhappy woman. Lolo is to her as a daughter of her own, and Lolo's two healthy, happy boys, make cheerfulness and noise, if not actual "sunshine in the shady place," which Temple Court no longer is.

The report of Mr. Davison's approaching

bankruptcy proved not to be a false one; and as, on this second occasion, he was not inspired by any bright and original idea, capable of enabling him to avert the coming ruin, events took their natural course, and the man whose successful trickery gave one of the best of wives to Conrad Temple, is now living, a confirmed invalid, on an income of two hundred a year, somewhere in the Essex Marshes.

Of Hartwell Davison nothing certain is known, but as a person very greatly resembling him was lately seen on the driving-seat of a hansom cab, it is just possible that he has at last adopted an honest method of gaining a livelihood.

Richard Temple has not, up to this time, at least, been able to make up his mind on the knotty point of who actually was, or is, the rightful owner of what he persists in talking of as "Laura's fortune;" whilst the Colonel, who has never gambled in the funds again, has not as yet shown the faintest symptom of regret at

having been (driven as he was by force of circumstances) the "First"—in the days of Laura Ripley's heiresshood—"in the Fortune Hunter's Field!"

THE END.

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